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The Crew of the Dolphin

Hesba Stretton.

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CREW OF THE DOLPHIN.

THE

CREW OF THE DOLPHIN

BY

HESBA STRETTON.

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THE

CREW OF THE "DOLPHIN."

CHAPTER I.

HIGH STREET, WAPPING.

THE autumn was sweeping along irresistibly over land and sea, putting summer to flight with evershortening days and nights of deeper darkness. For some time past the morning mists had been gathering more thickly on the river and in the streets of London, giving due warning of the denser fogs that were about to follow in their wake. The wind had been easterly, with a touch of northerly in it when it veered at all.

The Thames was of a more slaty hue than it had been in the sunnier light of summer. But it had been calm still weather for some days; and when the mist rolled away each day towards noon, a light, bright blue sky shone overhead, with soft clouds floating slowly westward before the low east wind.

Down at Wapping, in the High Street, where the houses towards the river have almost all been turned into wharfs and warehouses, there was a good deal of stir and activity. Vessels lay outside to be laden; and the clanking of the cranes lowering the cargoes into the holds might be heard all day. But for sounds like this Wapping would have been the quietest spot in London. No omnibuses were passing; and there were not many trains running to the little station on the bank of the river. Back, in Great Hermitage Street, there was scarcely a sign of life, a few chil-

dren playing about an empty cart without a horse, were all the population to be seen ; and the quiet houses were shut in and sheltered by the high unscaleable walls of the London Docks—walls that rose far above the roofs of the dwelling-houses outside, as though to guard the treasures within even from the view of any unprivileged eyes. A little shop here and there was doing a struggling business in nails, wooden dolls, and red herrings. In some dark windows there was an attempt at a display of tempting literature ; and penny books were dangling along a string stretched across the lower panes, such as "The Story of Cinderella," "Jack the Giant Killer," and "Mother Goose." In the public-house windows might be seen some ancient number of "Punch," much soiled and yellow with age. But for the stir and business about the wharfs and docks, Wapping on an autumn day is not

a spot where a man out of work will feel his spirits happiest and brightest.

It was quite plain that Peter Blake did not find his spirits high. He had been gazing vacantly for sometime through the railings of St. John's churchyard, where the moist yellow leaves were falling slowly from the trees upon the damp graves and stained head-stones below them; but at last he moved listlessly away, and sauntered homewards into High Street. His feet stopped, as if of themselves, before the black board at the police station, and he read the notices on it slowly and carefully, his lips moving with each word. They were all of bodies found drowned. He read through each description; the supposed age, the color of the hair and complexion, the marks by which their friends, if they had any, might identify them; but he hardly paid attention to these details. There was a general

vague impression on his mind that six or seven persons had been drowned lately in the Thames ; but what was that compared with the loss of life at sea ?

That he was a seaman any one could see at a glance. His face, young as it was, was weather-worn, and had fine lines on it which would soon be deep enough to be called wrinkles. His grey eyes were deep-set, and gleamed out from under his eyebrows, as if he knew himself bound to keep a sharp look-out both afloat and ashore. He was thin and slight, but wiry, and could climb a mast as quickly as any sailor of his acquaintance. There was a limber suppleness about him not altogether English. When you came to know that his mother had been a French fisherman's daughter, from the coast of Normandy, you could account for the spring and elasticity of his frame, as well as for its strength and

toughness. A first rate mariner without a doubt; if only he was as good a man in other ways.

"Hullo, Blake!" cried a cheery voice behind him, "you're the very fellow I'm searching for."

Peter turned quickly from his study of the dismal list, and faced a man with a frank, pleasant face, weather-worn like his own; but his hair was white, and his skin deeply furrowed with wrinkles, though he was scarcely past middle age. Peter took off his blue cap, but at the same time stretched out his hand, which was cordially shaken by the person who had spoken to him.

"Good-day, captain," he said; "you've been searching for me?"

"High and low, Peter," he answered. "Come now, I want one more good fellow to make up my crew—one man and a cabin boy.

The pay's good; I'm not bound to stint the pay. There will be fourteen of you. Come. You know the sort of skipper I am; and I know you. You may come upon pretty much your own terms. Choose your own berth, and there's only the mate's I can't give you."

"I've half promised Bessie to give up the sea," said Peter, with a smile.

"And a fine land-lubber you'd make of yourself!" cried the captain, contemptuously. "What could a fine fellow like you do? Turn counter-jumper, eh? and measure out yards of ribbon and tape? and sell pins and needles? No, no. Stick to the sea, my lad; stick to the sea. There's more danger for you and me ashore than afloat."

"You and me, we've seen plenty of danger afloat, though, captain," answered Peter.

"Ay, lad," he said, "there's perils by sea and perils by land, as the Bible tells us; but

give me the perils by sea. Let me go and talk to Bessie, and old madam, your mother. It's the French blood in you talks of giving up the sea."

"No, no," answered Peter, warmly; "it's the rowdy crews, and the drinking captains, and the rotten old boats, and the thought of Bessie and the children, and my old mother thrown on cold charity and the wild world, if aught happened to me. There's times and times I think that a God-fearing man, and a man that loves the poor things hanging on him for life, has no call to go to sea."

"Well! I'm none of your drinking captains," said Captain Norcott, heartily, "and the crew is no rowdier than can be helped and the boat's not rotten. You can go and see for yourself. She's the 'Dolphin,' and they're loading her at Penrose's wharf, hard by."

"I wouldn't set my foot aboard one of Penrose's boats; no, not for a thousand pound down," exclaimed Peter.

"Did I say it was Penrose's boat?" asked the captain. "They're only loading her; a miscellaneous cargo. She's as pretty a sailing vessel as ever you saw, and rides on the water like a bird; sails as white as milk, and as freshly painted as if a royal princess was expected aboard. Blake, do you think I'd go out in her, if I didn't think she was all right, and my poor old wife left behind, crying and praying for me all the while I'm away?"

"Where is she bound for?" inquired Peter.

"A mere run to Algiers, my lad," he said, "and there you'll be no end of use to me, with your French lingo. Come; I'll not stint your pay. Why! if the wind keeps fair, we shall run down the channel like a steamer,

and be home again before the women's eyes have lost their redness from crying. To Algiers! It's nothing, just nothing. I'm not asking you to go to the Pacific, or the North Pole. Come on; and let me reason a bit with Bessie and the old mother. You promise them some fine gimcrack or furbelow, and they'll let you go fast enough."

"We're living down here, in Wapping," said Peter; "it's close by. Bessie has a sort of cousin, a sailmaker, and he gives her a lodgment in the house rent free, to look after it a bit; but he doesn't live there himself. I'll lead the way, captain."

CHAPTER II.

PETER BLAKE'S HOME.

THE sailmaker's house was not many yards distant. As Captain Norcott and Peter ascended the staircase to the second floor, they heard a young boyish voice singing loudly, and a woman's soft sweet note chiming in. The words of the chorus rang clearly out, as they stood for a minute listening at the closed door :—

"We're out on the ocean sailing,
To a home beyond the tide."

"That's Victor and Bessie," said Peter, with a smile of pride ; "they're always at it, specially Victor."

Quietly he opened the door, and Captain Norcott saw a large, old-fashioned room, with a deep bow-window, looking out upon that part of the Thames called the Pool. The ceiling was low, and discolored by time ; and the wainscotted walls had been painted of a color which it was now impossible to tell. There was little furniture in it, but it was good and clean, and a bright fire was burning without ashes in the large old grate. On one side of the fireplace stood a huge antique wooden cradle, with long rockers, beside which sat an old Frenchwoman, with dark, brilliant eyes, and a withered sallow face, which seemed the sallower from the whiteness of the cap she wore. She was rocking the heavy cradle with one foot, whilst her thin yellow hands were busy knitting a sailor's cap. Bessie was getting tea ready, and was standing for a minute waiting for

the kettle to boil. Victor, a bright handsome boy of thirteen, was nursing fondly a little girl of about five years of age. Peter paused for a few seconds, and Captain Norcott stood silent, looking on at the pleasant little home before him, whilst a sudden thought of the rough life on board flashed across him. The only one who saw them at the door was the child on Victor's knee, who stared solemnly and shyly at the stranger.

"Mother! here's Captain Norcott," said Peter, loudly. The singing suddenly ceased, and the two women felt a sharp pang of dread. The sight of a sea captain in their pleasant room was a sure sign of a coming sorrow.

"Ay! you know what I'm come for Bessie," said the captain, shaking hands with her and the old mother; "it's for Peter again. You must be a brave lass, and bid

your husband go along with me. He's willing, if you are. A short voyage; good pay; no bullying, and as much of his own way as he can get. Those are the terms; come, don't let his shipmates say he's tied to his wife's apron-strings, and turned molly-cot."

"You men don't know what it is," said Bessie, half crying, "sitting in the house, and watching, and waiting, and seeing the storms blow up, and hearing the wind howl, and thinking of Peter in some nasty old ship that's only fit for firewood. I only wish Peter had to do it, and he'd soon find work on land or on the river."

"The ship, is it a good ship?" asked the old mother, staying her busy foot and hands; "is it a very good, strong, large ship? Peter is my very good son, and he must go in a very good ship. His father, Peter Blake, my husband, was a good man, and he voyaged

in a bad ship, and he came back never, never."

"She is a very good ship, madam," answered Captain Norcott, speaking loudly, as if the old Frenchwoman was deaf; "Peter can go and see her, and I hope he will. Why, there's me and a dozen more ready to run the risk, what risk there is, and Peter is as brave as any one of us. Don't make him a coward. Peter's calling is to the sea, and he'll do no good off it. Fleck's one of the crew, and if there's any danger, catch Fleck going. You all know what Fleck is. He'll only go when there's a good job on hand."

"Fleck's a coward," said Bessie, more hopefully; "he's been in jail twice for breaking articles. Now if Peter signs he'll go; there'd be no keeping him back. But suppose Fleck deserted at the last minute again?"

"If Fleck's signed articles it's all right," said Peter; "he knows his boat, you may depend on it. He's not going aboard any old one, and he's not going to run himself into jail again. But I'll go down and look at her myself, and then I'll sign. I'm thinking I must go with you this once, captain."

Victor had pushed himself forward in the little group, and stood looking up intently into his brother's face, as if his own fate hung upon his decision. Now he uttered a shout of gladness, and caught Peter's arm between both his hands.

"And take me as cabin boy!" he cried; "mother 'll let me go with you, Peter. I've been out to Dunkirk many a time, and to Havre twice. I know a boat almost as well as you do, Peter."

"Ay, it's true," said Peter, looking to the captain; "you know Victor, sir. I'll answer

for him being obedient and trustworthy, and I don't deny I'd like having him along with me."

"Why, this is just as it should be," answered Captain Norcott; "I'm in want of a cabin boy, and Victor's a born seaman. Only look here; you must decide sharp. We must go out with the tide to-morrow, and if you don't come I've to find others that will. Go down and see her at once, Blake; it's light enough yet, and they're getting her cargo in as fast as they can. Let me know to-night if you'll come or no. I'm lodging in Red Lion Street, hard by."

"Are you sure it is a very good ship?" asked the mother, eagerly; "they are my two only sons. In France one takes care the ships are good enough, but here in England you do all as you please. If I was a sailor I would go tap, tap all over the ship before I

say I will go. My poor husband, he laughed at me, but all the same his good ship did break up like a little match-box, and he drowned himself. If my two only sons drowned themselves, what must we do, Bessie and me, and the two little babies?"

"You trust them to me," shouted the captain, "and I'll bring them safe home again. I knew your husband, madam, and he was a brave man. Now, Blake, go and look at the 'Dolphin,' and let me know what you mean to do as soon as you can."

Captain Norcott walked back to Red Lion Street slowly and thoughtfully. For some days past there had been a few teazing doubts and suspicions troubling him, which seemed to have gathered tenfold strength when set against the little home scene he had just left. All the rest of his crew he had found and engaged about the docks and

wharfs, where the transaction had been a mere matter of business. But he had gone with Peter Blake into his home ; he had seen his old mother, a foreigner and stranger, and his little children, and his anxious young wife. The unwelcome misgivings that had been haunting him about the good ship "Dolphin" were certainly deepened by the interview. He had spoken cheerily and confidently to the women, because he looked upon them as timid creatures who would be afraid of the best vessel that sailed on the seas. But was the "Dolphin" as good a ship as he had assured them she was ?

Captain Norcott was an honest man and a well known careful commander. He took every reasonable precaution, in his own opinion. There was not a spark of cowardice in his nature, and the risk of the present voyage did not appear to him so great as

many he had run into with his eyes open. But he had been on shore some time, and he was eager to be off again. He did not know for certain that the "Dolphin" was not thoroughly seaworthy; though he had a shrewd suspicion that she belonged only nominally to Blackburn, the owner whose name appeared on the ship's papers. Penrose was the real owner—old Penrose, whose name was notorious among seafaring men and at insurance offices. Penrose was superintending the lading, and the cargo was not of such a character as to remove the captain's doubts. He wished he had not told Peter so positively that the "Dolphin" did not belong to Penrose. He did not think for a moment of drawing back from his own engagement, but he hesitated when he thought of Peter Blake and the bright young lad Victor. If harm came of this

voyage, what would those two helpless women say to him ?

He turned sharply about to hurry back to the sailmaker's house. But the recollection came to him of the emphatic manner in which he had assured them all that the ship was good. Well! no doubt she was good enough ; he had nothing definite to say against her. And if the story got wind and reached Penrose's ears, how could he explain himself ? Besides, it would be better for all sides to take a steady, trusty, able seaman like Peter, and a brisk intelligent boy like Victor, than pick up any idle loafers he might find hanging about the docks. The voyage would be all the safer with such good hands on board ; and if he failed in getting the full crew, he knew very well old Penrose would send the "Dolphin" to sea under-manned.

Surely the chances were at least even. The weather was calm and the wind favorable. His crew was a fair one, taken altogether, though the mate was a stranger to him—a man of the name of Blackburn, related to the owner, and put in by Penrose. But he knew quite half his men. Peter Blake in himself was worth three of the others. No; he could not let Blake off. All that a captain could do he would to ensure the success of the voyage. He would hold himself ready to sacrifice property to life at the first certainty of danger. He would not run the risks he should feel it to be his duty to if he knew assuredly his vessel to be a sound one. No! no! The crew should be saved whatever else was lost.

He strolled down to the water's edge and looked at the shipping in the river. They were still busy at Penrose's wharf, and he

could see the long arm of the crane swinging to and fro as the cargo was being lowered into the hold. A man and a boy stood near, looking on. They must be Peter Blake and Victor. Well! They should decide for themselves. Peter was quite as able to form an opinion as himself; he knew a good boat when he saw one. The captain turned away, and walked off to his quiet, old-fashioned lodging in Red Lion Street.

In about an hour's time he was called away from his fireside to speak to a sailor at the house-door. It was Peter Blake, and Victor's eager young face met the captain's eye as they stood in the light of the street lamp. He scarcely knew what he wished them to say. They would be valuable to him; but the thought of those women and the little children still weighed heavily on his heart.

"Well, Blake!" he said.

"We'll sign articles to morrow, captain," answered Peter; "Fleck says she's all right, and I don't see aught amiss with her as yet. We'll go."

CHAPTER III.

LAST HOURS.

THERE was but little sleep in Peter Blake's home that night. The children slept, and more than once Peter went to look at them, and to listen to their quiet breathing. They were very dear to him, and they seemed dearer to him than ever now. Bessie, too, and his mother, it was always a hard struggle to leave them; though now the matter was settled, they said nothing to grieve him, and simply set about the necessary preparations for his departure.

The articles were signed early the next morning in Penrose's office. Peter was care-

ful to inquire the name of the owner of the "Dolphin," and was told it was James Blackburn—a name quite strange to him, but it satisfied him that the ship was not the property of Penrose. Within the last few years Penrose had lost a large number of vessels, and prudent seamen fought shy of sailing in one of his boats. Peter was one of the prudent seamen. He held it to be his duty both to God and to his family not to sail in any doubtful craft, whatever might be the inducements offered to him. "No; not to be skipper," he had often said to himself. He was afraid that his heart might fail him in a moment of peril if his conscience was not clear that he had not run into it with his eyes open.

Yet as the day wore on, busy as he and Victor were, he grew somewhat uneasy about the coming voyage. From one side of the

bow-window overlooking the river he could see the lading of the "Dolphin." Every hour she was sinking lower and lower in the water; yet still the cargo was being stowed away in every spare foot of room. If the vessel was sound and seaworthy, and if the weather was fair, the trip might be made with safety; but he could see plainly that no margin was being left for unforeseen casualties. It was quite clear, too, that there must be some cargo on deck; and he knew very well how greatly that would add to the difficulty of managing the ship. He was a brave man; and he had a sincere, hearty trust in God. But he did not look to God to work a miracle in order to avert the consequences of man's negligence or covetousness. Perhaps he had been too hasty in signing articles; yet he had been satisfied at the time—satisfied by his own slight inspection of the

"Dolphin," and by the assurances of Captain Norcott and Fleck. Moreover, he had lately declined to go aboard two or three doubtful boats, and his funds were well-nigh exhausted. He knew that Bessie had only a few shillings in the purse before he had brought her the instalment of his wages, paid over to him as soon as he had signed his articles.

He could hardly bear to look round from the window from which he had seen the greedy overloading of the "Dolphin," upon those dear to him in the home he was so soon to leave. His mother and wife were busy, almost too busy for sorrow. Bessie was washing, and his mother stitching away with swift fingers at the clothes he and Victor were to take with them. The baby lay on the hearth, kicking his heels against the floor and babbling soft little baby-sounds,

which passed unnoticed in the general press of work. His little girl had been in his arms, clinging round his neck, while he pointed out to her the pretty ship he was going to sail down the river in. He knew that all the comfort and happiness of these helpless women and children depended upon his life; and he was about to entrust his life to the heavily-laden ship, now sinking lower and lower in the water. But there was no help for it. If he ran back now, he would not only be branded as a coward, but he would be imprisoned for three months in the common jail, among a vile horde of criminals. He felt that he could never get over that. He knew what a rowdy crew in the forecastle of a vessel was; but he shrank none the less from the degradation and contamination of a company of convicts and criminals.

"What ails you, Peter; what makes you so

low?" said Bessie, the tears starting to her eyes as she asked the question.

"Why, it's quitting thee, lass," he answered, trying hard to speak cheerfully; "thee, and mother, and the little young creatures. How'd you like me to be as gay as a lark just now?"

"It's nought else?" she asked again; "there's nought against the ship, is there?"

"Everybody says she's a good ship," he said; "Fleck told me he'd sailed in her twice, and he's willing to sail in her again, though he's careful of his neck, Fleck is. And Captain Norcott's a very cautious man; I never heard a word against our captain."

"Fleck's nobody to go by," said Bessie, sadly; "he'd be no loss to anybody. But the captain spoke well; and you're very cautious yourself, aren't you, Peter? I'm certain sure

that if it was me that was going, and you that had to stay at home with the children, thinking all the while, 'Maybe Bessie's lying at the bottom of the sea this very minute,' you'd never, never let me go out in a ship that wasn't trusty."

"Bessie," said her husband, tenderly, "we know who takes care of thee and me."

"Yes," she sobbed, "yes, my dear; but I think sometimes, if God Almighty could be worn-out and wearied, it's with the prayers we women pray to him, to take care of our men at sea. There's days and days when the cry is never out of my heart, like as if I was a poor helpless baby, crying and moaning to him. I know he loves us all, and cares for us all; and yet men are drowned at sea, and their wives never see them any more, and never hear their voices call to them; and they have to fight their way

through the world all alone. You are sure she's a good ship?"

"She's a beauty," put in Victor, eagerly; "a regular beauty. She's the prettiest boat in the river at this minute, that's what she is. Don't you be afraid, Bessie; nor you, mother. There isn't half as much danger on board as there is down High Street; not a quarter. I'm more afraid for Nannie going along the street, than you need be for us. Why, it's certain that God is with every one of us."

Victor's face flushed deeply, and his eyes sparkled as he spoke. The last words were not uttered as if they were a mere form of speech. He did not even say them with that half mistrust of their truth with which Peter and Bessie had spoken of God's care. His voice faltered and fell a little; but he felt sure of what he was saying.

"Jesus Christ knows what it is," he went

on, tremulously. "He knows what storms are, and how boats are tossed up and down, and how men are at their wits' end; and he's heard their cry, 'Lord, save us, or we perish.' It isn't as if Jesus had never come down into this world, and been a man like us. I daresay his mother was fearfully frightened the night there was that great storm at sea, and she didn't know how he could be saved. But he came home safe in the morning; and he'd see how terrified she'd been, and he'd comfort her and make much of her. It isn't as if he did not know exactly. I suppose he loved his mother, the same way Peter and we do; only ten thousand times better. I'm glad Jesus knows what it was to go away and leave her; ay, and come back again too."

"Victor speaks true," said the old mother, lifting up her brown, wrinkled hands; "the

Lord Jesus, he knows all about it, and the good God sent him to be made like us. I will make a little prayer to him many, many times by night and by day."

There was nothing more said for a time. The last hours were slipping quickly away, and the moment for parting came too soon at last. Bessie and little Nannie clung weeping to Peter. The old mother looked pale and anxious; but she neither cried nor spoke much. Already she had lost her husband at sea; and she knew how impossible it was for her sons to guard against the same perils. She had lived among seafaring folk all her life, and was not afraid of the necessary dangers of a seafaring life; but there was always a secret dread in her heart that the vessel her sons sailed in was not seaworthy. That they might have entrusted their lives to some rotten old hull was what gave the

greatest bitterness to seeing them sail from any English port.

"Is it a good ship?" were her last words to Peter, as she held his sunburnt face between both her hands, and gazed earnestly into his eyes.

"Ay, mother; don't be afraid," he answered, though his voice was nearly choked in speaking to her.

CHAPTER IV.

THE HOLLOW OF GOD'S HAND.

AT the last moment two of the crew refused to sail in the "Dolphin," on the score of her being overladen. The pilot was on board, and all was ready, but they steadily resisted every effort to get them to set a foot upon her. The river police were called to urge them to their duty or to take them into custody, but they declared loudly they would rather spend the next three months in the worst jail ashore than run the risk of sailing with such a cargo. Captain Norcott argued and stormed by turns, and such of the men as were not drunk over-

whelmed them with abuse, excepting Peter Blake, who stood by in silence. By the desertion of these two, the dangers they feared to face were considerably increased for those who remained, as there was now no time to fill up their places, and the "Dolphin" would be undermanned.

"Captain," said Peter, as the two men were led away by the policemen, "I'd give all the world if you'd let Victor off."

"Hold your tongue, you coward," answered the captain passionately, "if any other soul goes it shall be to jail like those rascals yonder."

"The 'Dolphin' sailed slowly down the river, tugged by its little pilot-boat. It was growing dusk, and Peter and Victor could see the light already shining through the bow-window of their home. In a little while they saw too the heads of those who were looking

through it at the passing vessel. There was Bessie, with the baby nestling up against her neck, and the dear old mother, holding Nannie, as if to keep her from falling through the open casement. They had lit the lamp that Victor and Peter might see them more clearly. "Thank God!" said Peter to himself, "they don't know what's been going on at the wharf."

But it could not be long before they heard the bad news. The gossip soon spread from one to another throughout Wapping that two sailors had gone to jail rather than sail in the "Dolphin." Bessie's cousin, the sail-maker, came in to tell her the first thing in the morning.

"So Peter's off in the 'Dolphin,'" he said, significantly. "Well, well, they tell me she was only a few inches above water amidships, and that was in the river, where the water's as

smooth as a pond. Dear! dear! to think that men with wives and children will run such risks! But he had always a fine spirit, had Peter, afore he married. He's been more timorous since, but his spirit is showing itself again now. How ever could you let him go in the 'Dolphin,' Bessie?"

"Captain Norcott said it was a very good ship," answered Bessie, trying hard not to let herself be frightened. She knew the old sailmaker was a man who made the worst of everything, and took a pleasure in trouble, especially in the trouble of other people. A day was irksome to him if it did not bring the excitement of hearing of some calamity; and a terrible shipwreck with great loss of life was an event of the utmost interest to him.

"Captain!" he said, in a tone of contempt; "what's a captain's word worth? He wanted a first-rate seaman like your Peter, and he'd

swear his head off that the 'Dolphin' was the very best boat in the river."

"Victor's gone too," said Bessie, trying to speak calmly.

"Victor! Well now, I am sorry," exclaimed the old man. "I shall miss him sore, singing his songs about the house. Madam, why did you let Victor go? Well, I shall never look to hear his voice again. You've heard that two of the crew are gone to jail rather than venture in her."

"No!" cried Bessie. "No. It can't be true. You're frightening me, and its not kind of you. I'm that shaken I can't bear up against bad news."

"I'm only telling you what they've told me," said the sailmaker, slowly; "everybody is talking about it in High Street. They're all telling the same tale. Why! what's the woman going to do?"

Bessie had started from her rocking-chair as he spoke, and almost tossed the baby into the cradle. All the color had died out of her face, but she was not rendered passive or languid by the shock of dread. She tore down her shawl from the nail behind the door, and before the sailmaker could speak again she had fled from the house, as though by some mighty effort of will and energy she could bring the vessel back to its moorings.

There were plenty of men employed about High Street whom she knew well; for she had lived all her life in Wapping. She seized the arm of the first man she met, and held it with a convulsive strength.

"The 'Dolphin!'" she gasped; "is it a good ship?"

"Ay! ay! Good enough," answered the workman, kindly. "Peter's gone aboard her —hasn't he? Don't frighten thyself, Bessie.

She's a fairly good ship, and he's a right good seaman."

"But there were two men," she sobbed, "wouldn't go—'ud rather go to jail—is it true?"

"Well, they say so," he answered, reluctantly; "there are always some cowards and fools. But Peter's neither coward nor fool, I reckon. Fleck's gone, and his wife's as content as can be."

"Fleck's wife's not like me," cried Bessie, "and Fleck's not like my Peter. Oh! if any harm comes to him, what shall I do?"

"What harm's to come to him?" asked the man, with a gruff kindness. "He's as safe there as here, and safer may be, if you reckon on the lifeboats. We men can't be shut up in safety-boxes, Bessie Blake. Men must work, and not be too nice about danger. But you keep your mind on the lifeboats, if any

storm comes up ; and the 'Dolphin' is all right as long as this weather lasts."

Bessie returned home somewhat comforted. There were always cowards that flinch at the last moment, she thought ; and she felt proud that her husband was no coward. It had been his name for having a high spirit that had first won her love ; and she knew in her inmost heart that if she once suspected him of being a coward, both respect and love would die away. Yet she felt terribly lonely and desolate as she entered her home again. The morning sun was breaking redly through the mist, and she saw the masts of many vessels looming through it ; but the 'Dolphin' was far away by this time. Nannie was seated at the window, with her quiet calm little face turned towards the river.

"Mother," she said, in her childish voice, as Bessie stood over her, gazing sadly down

upon the treacherous waters, "Uncle Victor told me God holds the sea in his great strong hand, like me holding this tiny, tiny drop of water."

She had made a hollow of her small soft hand, and as she opened it Bessie saw a drop of water lying in the little dimple.

"And, mother," she went on, "if there came a great big storm, and the wind blew hard, God could shut up his hand, and take care of father's ship, like me taking care of this tiny drop of water."

"Ay; he could," cried Bessie, hiding her tearful face on the child's curly head.

"That's my little sea," said Nannie, "and I won't let any big storm come to it. Uncle Victor said God will take care of him and father."

"But maybe God will take them to heaven," sobbed Bessie.

"Won't they be happy there?" asked the child. "Isn't God there? And Jesus—isn't he in heaven?"

"But we sha'n't be there," answered Bessie; "you and me. We shall have to wait here a long, long while, and never have them home again."

"But we'll go there, too," said Nannie. "Uncle Victor says Jesus loves us so, he wants us to go and live with him; and we'll all go some day, mother."

"If we could only go together," said Bessie, with a sigh. But she felt comforted. Her little girl's happy, peaceful face seemed to soothe her strangely. Even the sight of the small folded hands, holding the drop of water so carefully, calmed her troubled spirit. Yes; it was true. Peter and Victor were safe in the hollow of God's hand. She could not sing yet; but over and over again Bessie whis-

pered to herself, when her eye fell upon Nannie, sitting quietly in the sunny window :—

"This, this is the God we adore,
Our faithful, unchangeable Friend;
Whose love is as great as his power,
And neither knows measure nor end."

CHAPTER V.

NOT THE "DOLPHIN."

THE "Dolphin" ran down the river; whilst the crew, such as were sober, were busy putting things somewhat shipshape before entering the Channel. Upon the whole it was a fairly good and steady crew. Peter Blake welcomed with much satisfaction two or three men who had the character of being thoroughly able seamen. Fleck was there; a sly, foxy-looking man, whose word was trusted by none of them, but who was an active, clever sailor. It was, above all, his presence that had made Peter willing to sail in the "Dolphin." He knew

Fleck would serve on board no ship that he thought unseaworthy; and Peter felt that he could rely upon his judgment as to the "Dolphin's" sea qualities as well as he could upon his own. Fleck had sailed twice before in her, and knew her better than his house at home. Upon the whole Peter felt calmer now the die was cast, and there was no possibility of retreat.

The "Dolphin" was certainly heavily laden, and the crew was short of two hands. But Captain Norcott was a first-rate skipper; and as soon as they were round the North Foreland the light north-east wind would carry the vessel down the Channel like a bird. Peter felt that he could justly write a line home, to post at Gravesend, full of comfort and encouragement. Victor put in a few words, written in the highest spirits. Everything was first-rate to him; no better

ship than the "Dolphin" had ever sailed down the Thames; and no hero had ever lived to be compared with her captain. He gave a loud, long, ringing cheer to the little steam-tug, as it fell away from them; and the men on board it answered him, but there seemed a lack of heartiness in their hurrah.

"Blake," said Fleck, as they stood for a moment or two leaning over the gunwale, and looking after the steam-tug, "Blake," and he lowered his voice mysteriously, "she's not the 'Dolphin.'"

"Not the 'Dolphin,'" he repeated; "what do you mean, man?"

"Not the old 'Dolphin' as I sailed in before," Fleck continued. "I've been hauling her over in my mind's eye, and she's not my old 'Dolphin.' She's another craft altogether. Aye, aye! the other 'Dolphin' was a ship, of course she was, same as this; I'm

none such a blunderhead as that. But these ain't the rigging and the sails—no, nor the masts of my 'Dolphin.' I'm most in a maze. Is she the 'Dolphin?' I ask my own mind over and over again; and something inside of me says, No, Fleck, she's not your 'Dolphin.'"

"Are you sure of it, Fleck?" asked Peter. It was not possible to doubt him altogether. There was terror in his small, red eyes, and his face wore an anxious look. He was telling no lie now.

"Sure enough," he answered; "I'll swear it isn't the 'Dolphin.' "If I could have got off in yonder boat, I'd have served my three months in jail with a thankful heart, Peter Blake. What made me willing to come aboard her was thinking it was the old 'Dolphin;' the best boat Penrose had. I'd never have trusted myself to any other boat of his."

"But this isn't Penrose's," said Peter.

Fleck put his tongue into his cheek, and, in spite of his own anxieties, looked cunningly and contemptuously at Peter.

"Why, man alive! of course she's Penrose's," he replied. "Where did we sign articles? At Penrose's. Who paid your advance? Penrose. Not Penrose's! Whose is she, then?"

"The owner's name's Blackburn," he said, with a painful contraction of his heart. He seemed to see again, flashing across his mind for an instant, the bow-window, at home, with all his dear ones watching the ship sail by. Yet if Fleck was right, the "Dolphin" was only one of Penrose's floating coffins?

"Blackburn's nought save a bankrupt brother-in-law of Penrose's," said Fleck, half laughing. "There's only One above as can take us

safe to Algiers, and bring us home again ; and it'll be sore against Penrose's wishes if He does."

"Does our captain know?" asked Peter, fiercely.

"May be ay, may be no," answered Fleck; "but the mate knows all about it, I swear. He could tell where we are bound for. Not Algiers, but Davy Jones's locker, I reckon."

He went away muttering the last words, for all hands were wanted ; and Peter had to dismiss the painful thoughts crowding into his brain to attend to the working of the ship. It was when he was at last in his hammock that he had time to turn over what Fleck had said. How much he ought to believe, he hardly knew ; but it was plain Fleck himself felt caught in a trap. Was it possible that the original 'Dolphin' could have been lost at sea, and some old hulk bought and rigged

out to take her place? It was quite possible. Quite possible it was, too, that Penrose, finding it more and more difficult to meet with crews willing to man his vessels, should have put in, as a nominal owner, his brother-in-law, whose name had not yet gathered any ill-fame. Peter Blake had a brave heart, and his spirit was high; no man had ever accused him of cowardice. But as he thought of his position and of the risk he ran, with the almost certain death that lay before him, his spirit quailed. He was not sure that he had done all he ought to have done before signing articles. True, Captain Norcott had urged and over-persuaded him. True, Fleck, the coward, had agreed to be one of the crew. True, his funds were very low, and had he remained on shore, serious money difficulties were staring him in the face. But the thought of Bessie and little Nan, of his mother and the baby, brought the

tears smarting and stinging under his eyelids. He had been guilty of real cruelty to them; and how terribly they would suffer for his over-rash courage and contempt of danger! If he had been aboard a good ship, well laden, and with a suitable crew, there was no peril of seas he dared not confront. But how could he look up to God and ask him to work a miracle that Penrose's old hulk of a vessel, with its heavy cargo, might reach the appointed haven, spite of wind and weather? He was a reasonable man, and he knew that God's blessing is granted to man's best efforts; not given to avert from man the consequences of his own folly and crime.

"God forgive me!" he cried, "and God have pity on them at home!"

Peter Blake did not know it, but Captain Norcott was scarcely less troubled than himself. He had remonstrated in vain against the

over-lading of the "Dolphin;" and he had been so twitted for growing timorous in his old age, that he had retreated from the wharf in indignant silence, leaving Penrose and the the ship's broker to load her as they pleased. When he came on board at the last moment, he knew that he and his crew were about to run a very narrow chance for their lives. If all the men had deserted, instead of two, he would not have been surprised. But before he had been in the ship twenty-four hours he had made two discoveries which heightened his misgivings. He found that the owner was no other than Penrose's brother-in-law; and that the first mate, placed on board by them, was a near relative of Blackburn. There was, moreover, something about this man which irritated and jarred upon him. He was in supreme command himself; but he doubted whether in any hour of peril his mate would second

him, or would not rather try to evade his orders.

There would be very little rest for him on this voyage. Only the most absolutely necessary repose must he take. If any man could take the "Dolphin" safely to Algiers, he would do it; but nothing on earth should induce him to command any vessel of Penrose's again. He almost wondered why Penrose should have offered him the post, and on terms so good as to make him careless of whose the ship was. But it would speak well for Penrose that he had sent her out to sea under a good and well-known captain, who could not be suspected of conspiracy with him. He felt himself to have been a simple cat's-paw in Penrose's grasp.

One thing he resolved upon. He would save his men. One thing he regretted. He wished he had let Victor go at the last

moment, when Blake had asked him. He was almost as fond of Victor as if he had been his own son. A lad that was as bright as a bird, and as lithe and active as a monkey. His singing kept up the spirits of the men, and his happy buoyant confidence seemed like sunshine among them. But Captain Norcott wished earnestly that he had not brought him. There was a more bitter reproval to him in the boy's merry smile than in the dark and frowning faces of his crew.

Thank God it was fair weather! The sea was calm, and the wind soft and low; the only fault was that it was too calm. The "Dolphin" seemed to be rocked to sleep on the smooth, milky waters; and her sails flapped lazily in the almost still air. But they were making their way down the Channel. The fatal Goodwin Sands and the Dungeness

Lighthouse lay behind them; Beachy Head had loomed out for a little while through the autumn mists, and the Isle of Wight was passed. If this weather held out, the voyage might be made without loss of life or vessel; but it would be a very slow one.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OWNER'S SON.

PETER BLAKE watched anxiously for a chance of speaking with the captain unobserved. But the mate seemed here, there, and everywhere, always in the way; an alert and untiring spy, never to be caught off his guard. Every man on board believed him to be a secret scout for Penrose. But Peter's chance came at last. The mate had turned in, and was safely asleep in his berth below; while the captain was in his little cabin on deck. Peter knocked at the door, and entering, closed it carefully behind him. Small as the cabin was, it had been crowded with some

cases of fire-arms, which had been put on board as part of the cargo at the last minute.

"Captain," said Peter, "Fleck swears that this isn't the real 'Dolphin' that he's sailed in twice before; and all the crew credit him. You've only to go round about her, and look her over well, and you'll see she's an older ship than she has the appearance of. In my opinion, she's nought else save a painted old Jezebel."

"What then, Blake?" asked Captain Norcott sadly.

"Why, sir," he answered, "you've known me a many years, and you can take my word now. I've not breathed a syllable to my shipmates; but I come to you, and I say run her into the nearest port, and save our lives and your own. She's Penrose's boat; and he's lost too many for us to trust him. The weather's changing, captain, you know. The

stars twinkled too much last night; and there have been wind-dogs amid the clouds. There was a high dawn this morning, and the sky was red and lowering. Just look up, and you'll see scud-clouds driving across the sky at this minute. I haven't spoke a word, sir; but, oh! captain, run in for the shore, for the nearest port, before it is too late."

Captain Norcott seemed lost in thought, and made no answer, while Peter went on with deeper earnestness—

"Think of all the women and children belonging to us men!" he said. "There'd be a bare chance for us, and nothing more, if the 'Dolphin' foundered, for she'd go to pieces like a child's plaything. We're no better off than rats caught in a trap, you and us, sir. The ship's meant to be cast away, and, the mate's here to make sure of it. Look here, sir; these fire-arms, what are they?

They are no more fire-arms than they are the Queen's crown jewels. It's salt; nothing but salt. The lid of one of them started a little when they were lying on deck, and I saw it; ay, and tasted it. What does that mean, captain?'

"It means the most cursed, infernal roguery, if it's true," exclaimed the captain, with passionate vehemence. "Those cases are insured for 1,500*l.*, and Penrose begged me to have them safe in my own cabin here. I'll look into them, Blake."

The lid of the topmost case was prised open in a few seconds, and Captain Norcott saw with his own eyes that there was only salt within it, instead of the valuable fire-arms he believed it to contain. He stood staring at it for a minute or two; and then sat down, covering his face with both hands. Here was a terrible perplexity. What was he to do?

What could it be his duty to do? Was he justified in pursuing the voyage in the face of a coming storm, and with such evidence before him that the owner of the 'Dolphin' was guilty of foul play? Or must he put into port, and run himself into the difficulty and trouble of bringing exposure, ruin, and disgrace on the head of his employer? Penrose richly deserved it; but would he not, by some means or other, shift the blame from himself, and make a scapegoat of some innocent person? He knew such men could often evade the law; and that not seldom those who did their utmost to bring evil practices to light were the chief sufferers for their moral courage. It would need a great amount of moral courage to fight a man like Penrose. Was he strong enough himself for the task?

Captain Norcott had almost forgotten

Peter Blake's presence, so absorbed was he in these painful thoughts, when suddenly the clear voice of Victor rang down from the mizzen-top-mast.

"Boat astern! Stop her!" he shouted.

In a moment both the captain and Peter were out on deck. Victor was swinging down the mast as swiftly as a monkey, and presented himself almost breathless before the captain. "There's a boat drifting, please sir," he gasped; "only one man in her. He's making signals to me. Oh, please, sir, may I go with them in the quarter-boat to pick him up?"

Captain Norcott could not help smiling at the lad's eagerness, as he walked up with his telescope, Victor following him closely. Presently he made out for himself a little pleasure-boat, drifting and tossing helplessly on the water. A man was standing on one

of the thwarts, evidently striving to attract their notice. He ordered a boat to be lowered at once, and Fleck and Peter, with Victor at the tiller, to hasten to the rescue, while the "Dolphin" lay to until they could return.

It was more than half an hour before they came alongside the little boat, which, tossing as it was upon the waves, plainly made no attempt to meet them. But when they reached it at last they found a young man sitting well-nigh exhausted on the thwart and hardly able to speak to them. It was a little pleasure-boat, gayly painted, meant for no rougher voyage than cruising about some sheltered bay.

"I lost one of my oars," said the young boatman, faintly, "and the boat drifted out with the tide. I've had nothing to eat all night, and I'm nearly lost. Have you anything to eat with you?"

"No; but we'll be back in the ship in half an hour," answered Peter, steadying him with his strong hand as he stepped from his own boat into theirs; "we didn't stay for any provisions, sir. But you're safe now."

"Yes, I'm safe now," said the stranger. He spoke confusedly, and his eyes, which had a worn-out, terrible expression, looked intently into Peter's face.

"I've been near death!" he said, as he sank down on a bench; "I've been near death!" He looked about him on the dancing waves, bewildered and awe-stricken. "I've been near death!" he muttered a third time.

"Ay, ay, sir! We're all of us near death," said Peter, turning to him for a moment from fastening the pleasure-boat safely to their own; "there's only a step betwixt us and death."

"Only a step betwixt us and death!" he repeated, with a puzzled look; "but I'm safe now, thank God!"

"Look here, Peter!" cried Fleck, pointing to the name painted in letters of green and gold on the prow of the pleasure-boat; "what do you call that, eh?"

"'The Penrose!'" exclaimed Peter.

"That's my name," said the stranger, faintly; "I'm Arthur Penrose."

"Are you the son of Penrose, the ship-owner, who has a wharf and warehouse down at Wapping?" asked Peter, eagerly.

"Yes," he answered.

"Yonder's one of his ships," put in Fleck, and we're part of the crew. The 'Dolphin' she is, sir."

"But the 'Dolphin' was lost at sea," said young Penrose, putting his hand to his head, and still looking about him confusedly.

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried Fleck; "yet there she is, and you'll soon be aboard of her; one of your father's own ships, sir. There's something to think about!"

He grinned as he spoke, and glanced aside at Peter, with a gesture that said plainly that the lad of twenty whom they had just rescued was a poor blockhead, with no more wits than a baby. He looked delicate and feeble, and sat shivering in the boat, until Victor stripped off his blue jacket and wrapped it about his shoulders. Victor felt as if he had rescued him from death. If he had not been at the mast-head looking keenly round about him, the chances were great that young Mr. Penrose would not have been seen by any one of the crew.

"Safe now, thank God!" murmured the young man again.

"Aye, thank God!" said Victor. Never

had he felt so happy. God had chosen him to save the life of a fellow-creature, and his heart leaped with a triumphant gladness such as he had never felt before. He sprang on board the "Dolphin" and rushed aft to the captain, crying in an exultant voice—

"We've saved him, sir; and it's young Mr. Penrose!"

CHAPTER VII.

A DILEMMA.

"PETER," said Fleck, as they went forward to the forecastle, whilst young Penrose and the captain descended to the cabin, "Peter, lad, we're all saved now."

"How?" asked Peter, shortly.

"How! Won't the skipper be bound to run into port with the young owner yonder? and then, why, man alive! which of us men'll be fool enough to sail out again in this crazy old cockle-shell?"

"And how far are we from port?" asked Peter, gloomily; "haven't we run into the Middle Channel? and how's the wind blow-

ing? Maybe I could catch a sight of land from the mast-head. Did you see the sea last night, Fleck, all ablaze? And the sky's no longer blue, but white; and what do yonder tall clouds mean? The sea's going to pay up its old debts. There are no birds about, and this morning at daybreak I saw a flock of them flying southward fast, as if they were scared. They're in port by now, I guess; but I doubt whether all of us will set foot on shore again, though young Mr. Penrose is aboard."

"Don't you say so," cried Fleck, terrified, "we'll run in for shore at wunst; ay! if there were fifty mates and captains on board. Stir up the crew, Peter; they don't need more than a word from you to stir 'em up. It's for our lives, lad, and our poor girls at home."

Peter Blake did not answer immediately.

He stood shading his eyes with his hand, and gazing across the unbroken expanse of sky and sea. The water was still tranquil, but it was leaden-colored, and the sky above it looked wan and sickly. The clouds he had pointed out to Fleck stood up in tall, threatening pillars, towering behind a massive wall of dull grey. The wind had shifted since morning, and there was a low sighing in the air. Not a sail was in sight, not one of those little coasting vessels which run from port to port, and are careful not to put out in the face of a threatened storm.

"God help us!" he said, "and God help the women at home!"

"Stir up the men," urged Fleck; "it's not too late to run in, maybe. Stir up the men, and let's go to the captain at wunst."

"And be had up for mutiny!" answered Peter. "No, no; I'll wait for orders, Fleck.

They'll run no risk they can help, with young Mr. Penrose on board."

It was three o'clock in the afternoon; and the sun set before five. With a heart torn with anxiety, Peter waited to hear orders given for changing the ship's course. Any breeze, with such a ship, would be fraught with danger: and there was every sign of a gale rising. Night was coming on, too; night, which multiplied every peril tenfold. And still no orders came. Could the captain know what he was about? But Captain Norcott and his mate were having a stormy discussion in the cabin below. No one knew better than the mate what an unfortunate dilemma they were placed in by the unexpected presence of the owner's son on board the "Dolphin." That they must run for port was evident; yet it was certain that every man of the crew would desert, had they a chance

given to them. Then the exposure and the scandal, how was Penrose to be saved from that? The mate did not care to lay the difficulty in plain words before his employer's son; but Captain Norcott told him that the crew were on the point of mutiny, declaring the "Dolphin" to be unseaworthy.

"What's the matter with her?" he asked; "she's one of my father's finest ships, isn't she?"

"Some of the men say she's not the true 'Dolphin,'" replied the captain; "she was lost at sea, they say, and an older vessel has been named after her and put in her place. I can say nothing of my own knowledge about either 'Dolphin.'"

"But what do you think, captain?" asked young Penrose.

"I think she's a vamped-up, unseaworthy, infamous old cheat!" exclaimed the cap-

tain, losing for a moment his forced self-control.

"Do you mean my father knew it?" asked young Penrose, hotly.

"If it's true, he must have known it," he answered. "The old 'Dolphin' was his own ship. Blackburn here can tell you more than I know. They'd not dare to tell me."

"It's a lie, sir!" cried young Penrose; "and you shall answer for it. Blackburn, you know my father, and there isn't a better man living. A kinder-hearted man couldn't breathe; he never denied me anything, never. No! you shall not run the 'Dolphin' into port. I will go on with you wherever you are bound for. I shall feel no fear in one of my father's ships. And when we reach home in safety, I'll disgrace you publicly, captain; aye, if I can only do it by horse-whipping you in the streets of London."

The passion of the owner's son was so great, that it tended to calm Captain Norcott. He shook his head, sadly and silently. The mate, too, was silent; and in a minute or two young Penrose spoke again, less angrily.

"You don't know my father," he said, with a half sob, "but Blackburn knows him. What do you say about all this, Blackburn?"

"I say," he replied reluctantly, "we'd better make for port, if we can, and chance the crew deserting. He has no other son but you, Mr. Arthur, and it would be the death of him if you were lost."

"Do you mean there is real danger?" he asked, with a face of dread.

"A little, perhaps," answered the mate. "It's true the old 'Dolphin' was lost, and they put this in its place. But if the weather keeps fair it will be right enough; and if

anything happened her, it would be by accident of the sea, and nobody to blame."

"Then we'll go on," said young Penrose. "You shall not run into port for me. I'm not afraid of any ordinary peril by sea, and there can be no other in one of my father's vessels."

"Mr. Penrose," said Captain Norcott, "under God I'm master of this vessel for the present voyage; and no soul on board shall meddle with my authority. The 'Dolphin' was meant to be cast away; she's laden for it, and she's manned for it. I'm going on deck now to run her ashore, and I shall not quit the deck for one moment till I see her safely anchored in the nearest haven. You and your father may do what you choose, and what you can. Only, please God, it may not be too late to save her!"

Both captain and mate hurried on deck,

and in a moment all hands were at work. There was busy tramping about the ship; men ran aloft into the rigging cheerily, for the gloom of inaction and hopelessness was gone. A new spirit of vigor and obedience pervaded the crew, so lately on the verge of mutiny. Peter Blake worked with the energy of a man roused at last from despondency. The hope shone before him of returning to those whom he had left at home, and of restoring Victor to them. If the storm would but delay its coming, the freshening breeze would serve to waft them the more speedily to port. A ceaseless, though silent cry went up from his most inmost heart to God, that they might not perish on the sea.

But the night seemed to close in upon them more quickly than usual. A pall of thick clouds spread over the west, hiding the sun as it sank behind them. The wind had

quickened to a moderate breeze, and with full sail set the "Dolphin" was making about five knots an hour. But the captain found himself farther from the coast than he thought, and both wind and tide were dead against him. If the wind continued to rise it would soon be impossible to carry all sail.

A thick darkness came on, with heavy rain. The breeze freshened until it was necessary to reef all but a few sails. But it was not a gale yet—nothing like it, the men said to one another; every one of them had been out in worse weather. Victor's voice, chanting somewhere in the darkness, fell clearly upon Peter Blake's ear through the whistling of the shrouds. He was singing his loudest to outvie the wind, a psalm that Bessie and he had often chanted together at home:—"The floods have lifted up their voice, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their

voice; the floods lift up their waves. The Lord on high is mightier than the voice of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the sea!"

"That lad chants well," said a voice close at hand; and Peter could make out in the gloom the figure of young Penrose beside him. There was no one else near, so the remark must have been made to him.

"It's my brother, sir," he answered, "and it's a bitter grief to me that he's at sea this night."

"Why?" asked young Penrose. "You don't mean to say there's any danger, with no more breeze than this."

"Not if the 'Dolphin' was what she should be," he replied; "but she'll split up like a little match-box, as my poor mother says, if she only grazes a rock. Pray God we may keep in deep water whilst it's dark!"

"Do all the crew think as you do?" asked young Penrose. Peter could not see his face, but his voice was sad and faltering.

"To a man!" he answered; "every one amongst us. We knew there'd be little chance for us if any bad luck came. Oh! Mr. Penrose, sir, if ever you live to be a shipowner yourself, I pray God you may remember this night, and think of the poor sailors afloat, and their wives and children ashore, whose lives are in your hand. There's four belonging to me at home, and scarce a man among us that hasn't as many, or more, looking to him for bread; and here we're floating away towards death in a rotten old coffin. Think of that, sir. And God Almighty will hold your father to account for this night's work; aye! and many a night like it, when crews have been lost at sea, and

all gone down to the bottom, cursing him bitterly. Think of it, sir; and may God forgive him, if he can be forgiven for such a sin."

CHAPTER VIII.

ON THE ROCKS.

IT was past midnight when, amidst the thick rain and darkness, Captain Norcott saw, or fancied he saw, the lights of some vessel riding at anchor three or four miles away. The sea had grown rougher every hour, and the heavily-laden ship had become unmanageable, and would no longer answer her helm, though much of the deck cargo had been thrown overboard. Now and then flashes of lightning playing across the horizon revealed white lines of surf, breaking along a rocky coast, or some sunken reef, towards which they were helplessly driving.

Peter Blake was growing fearfully anxious. Never had life seemed so precious to him. Victor kept near to him, for there was nothing for the boy to do. But Captain Norcott gave orders for lighting up a signal fire on deck, and with almost fierce activity and haste Peter threw his whole strength into the task. A red flame soon blazed up high into the thick gloom of the night; they must keep that flame alight, or no eye could see them in the blackness. The minute-gun boomed across the dark waters. In the lurid light of the burning tar-barrel, the swarthy, weather-worn faces of the crew could be seen, drawn and pinched with fear, as they heaped upon the flame every combustible they could lay their hands upon. Peter Blake did not rest for a moment, or pause to cast a glance at the sea. That flame seemed to be the only link between him and Bessie, with the

other helpless ones, dependent on him, at home.

"Is there much danger, Peter?" asked Victor, as he followed him about the ship.

"Ay, my lad," he answered.

"Peter," said the boy, "suppose we are cast upon the rocks, and there's a chance for you, don't you think of me. Try your best to save yourself, for their sakes at home. Don't you lose any chance for me. Promise me, Peter."

"What will mother say?" asked Peter, with a heavy sob.

"It's for mother, and Bessie," he answered, "and baby, and little Nan. I'm not afraid. I'm thinking of what some great captain said once, 'We are as near to heaven by sea as by land.' I should only get there first, where Jesus Christ is, and you'll all come some day."

"Oh, Victor, my lad!" cried Peter, "it would break mother's heart, and mine."

"It would break all their hearts," he said, in a brave, unfaltering voice, "if both of us were lost at sea."

"God keep us off the rocks!" cried Peter again.

But almost as he spoke the words, the strange ripping sound of timbers crushing against a sunken reef grated through the ship. The "Dolphin" shivered and trembled like some living creature that has received its death wound. A loud, hoarse, simultaneous cry from the crew rang shrilly through the noise of the falling spars and the crashing of the masts. The white waves, which played ceaselessly about the hidden reef, leaped upon the deck, drowning the signal fire, which flickered and burned lower every minute. There was a wild confusion on board, for now each man thought only of saving his own life; and the dense darkness increased ten-

fold the confusion and the difficulty. Not one amongst them expected the ship to hold together for more than a few minutes. The bows were held fast by the rock which had pierced them; but the hinder part was beaten and broken by the waves. As the last gleam of light was dying out, Peter saw Victor's pale young face beside him, and felt his arms thrown round his neck.

"Save yourself," he said, "for their sakes at home. Good-bye."

"I cannot leave you," cried Peter. But in an instant Victor had loosed his hold, and was out of the reach of his brother's hand. He could no longer be seen in the darkness; but Peter heard his voice calling to him out of it.

"Good-bye," he said. "Tell little Nan that I told her true; the sea is in the hollow of God's hand. I'm not afraid."

The next moment a second loud crash was heard, mingling with the despairing cries of drowning men. The "Dolphin" was broken in two; and Peter himself was swept away into the black trough of the sea.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT AND DESPAIR.

BUT all the crew were not lost.

The point of rock that had pierced the hull still held the bows firmly. The foremast was left, though the main and mizen masts had been carried away. How long this small fragment of the "Dolphin" would hold together against the play of the surf, who could tell? The wreck shivered at every fresh gust of wind, and every dash of the tide against it; while the mast leaned and swayed to and fro over the tossing waters.

Fleck, when the second shock came, was clinging in abject terror to this mast, crying for mercy more loudly than any of his ship-

mates. When the hull parted amidships with a terrific crash, he clambered up into the shrouds, and peered wildly into the darkness, where the white foam of the surf was the only thing to be seen. For some minutes nothing could be heard amid the grinding of the spars, and the creaking of the crazy mast to which he clung, mingling with the roar of the waves far and near, thundering over a rocky coast. But by and by he heard voices beneath him; and he called out with a momentary feeling of relief and hope.

"Who's there?" he shouted, loudly, "who's left?"

"It's me," answered Victor, "me and Mr. Penrose."

"Nobody else?" shouted Fleck.

"Nobody!" he replied.

"We're all lost," cried Fleck, "every soul of us. We may go to the bottom any min-

ute. I'm coming down, for this mast 'ill lurch over before long. All through old Penrose, curse him!"

"Hush!" said Victor, "hush! he's here, holding on by me."

"I wish he was here," answered Fleck, descending from the tottering mast, "I'd sink more content if he was alongside of me."

But Arthur Penrose did not speak a word. He had tasted a bitterness worse than that of death during this terrible night. He had no wish to be rescued now that he had been the witness of the sudden death of many men, hurried out of life to satisfy his father's greed of gain. How could he ever forget it? If he lived, must he for ever see those despairing faces and hear that despairing cry? No; he would rather die than live with such a burden.

"He doesn't know what he's doing," said

Victor. "Perhaps he's like those men that crucified our Lord, and he prayed for them, 'Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.' He doesn't know, or he'd never do it again."

Did his father know what he was doing? The question pressed heavily on young Penrose. He could remember now, whilst he was clinging for bare life to the poor frail refuge left to them, how little concern he had felt when the news came that one of his father's vessels had been lost at sea. How many could he remember? The names came up before him clearly and distinctly, and he could not keep himself from checking them off upon his fingers. Some of them had never been heard of. What did that mean? Was it true that so many of his father's ships had foundered, with the loss of all the men on board? All the men! Not one to live

and return to tell the tale of his shipmates' doom. His brain began to wander. He fancied that he could see amid the surf the white, fierce faces of drowning men, jeering and mocking him, and stretching out long skeleton hands to drag him down to them. These were the men his father had drowned; his father, who was always so good and kind to him, but whose hands were redder with blood than any murderer's.

A grey light broke at last upon the surging sea, but with the coming dawn the wind was rising. All about they could see miles of white breakers, dashing roughly against the reefs lying under the shallow waters. The jeering faces no longer haunted him, but the morning brought with it a feeling of profound sadness. He recalled the time when he had been used to kneel on his mother's lap in the early morning, and say "Our Father."

But how long it was since then! How long it seemed since he had repeated that prayer, though it was but three days since he had joined in the words at church. He could not say "Our Father" now. His calamity had come, and God would mock at him. There was no chance for life, yet he did not dare to call upon God, as the little cabin boy beside him was doing. For, from time to time during the long dark hours he had heard Victor praying, and now and then singing softly to himself, but he himself could not pray. His misery and despair were too great.

"Look! look!" cried Victor, as the morning light strengthened; "a lifeboat! a lifeboat!"

Arthur Penrose and Fleck sprang to their feet. Out a little distance from them a boat was cruising hither and thither, as if in search of the wreck. But the white foam about

them was tossing in showers of spray higher than the one mast that was left, and seemed to conceal them from the view of those on board the boat. It was in vain they called and shouted; the din of the waters drowned their voices. Yet from time to time, as the boat rose on the crest of a wave, they could see it plainly, before it fell back into the trough of the sea. The hope that had taken possession of them died away, as they felt they could make themselves neither to be heard nor seen.

"Lad!" cried Fleck, hoarsely, "run up the mast. It'll hold a light weight like thee. Up with thee! Up! We shall all be lost if they miss catching sight of us."

"No, no!" said Arthur Penrose; "the boy shall not go. It would be certain death to him."

"Up! I say;" shouted Fleck, in a frenzy

of terror; there is no other chance. They must see him on the mast. Up, Victor!"

"I'll go," cried Victor, with a white, set face; "it's better for one to die than all of us. God's kept the mast from falling perhaps on purpose. Jesus Christ didn't save himself."

"Up quickly, lad," urged Fleck; "they'll go away and lose us. Up!"

But Victor was already climbing the tottering mast. A wild sea lay all round him. As far as his eye could reach rapid breakers were foaming to and fro over sunken reefs, and pointed rocks, which lifted themselves like needles above the surface. Two or three miles away lay an island; but between it and them there was a stormy wilderness of waters. If he could not make himself seen or heard by the crew of the lifeboat, they must all perish.

"Take care of mother, and them at home,"

he called out, looking down for a moment at the up-lifted faces of Fleck and Arthur Penrose.

"I will," answered Penrose; and Fleck shouted, "Ay, ay, lad!"

Cautiously, but swiftly, he climbed as high as he dared climb on the mast. He could feel it tottering and swaying with his weight; but it still held in its socket; and below him Fleck was urging him to mount still higher. The surf almost blinded him as it swept across his face, and the roar of the breakers deafened him. He clung with all his might to the mast, as he wiped the salt water from his dimmed eyes. Did they see him; the crew of the lifeboat? Were they steering towards them, or away? His young, clear, shrill voice rang above the din of the waves.

"Oh, God! let them hear me," he prayed, with a deep, heavy sob.

Yes! they heard. He could see them signal back to him that he was seen. They were drawing nearer and nearer. As long as he kept his perilous post they could steer directly towards them; but if he left it, they might lose sight of the wreck again in the wash of the sea. Once more Victor lifted up his voice.

"Oh! come quickly," he cried.

"We're coming as quickly as we can!" they called back again.

Now he might go down; but just then a great sea which had been rolling towards them unnoticed, tossed itself high against the rocks, and broke over the wreck with resistless force. The tottering mast bent like a reed before it. Arthur Penrose saw Victor clinging to it as it swayed over, and heard him cry, "Our Father!" Then he himself lost all consciousness of his own perilous position.

CHAPTER X.

VICTOR'S GRAVE.

WHEN Arthur Penrose came to himself, with a painful sense of effort to struggle back to life, he opened his eyes upon a group of strangers surrounding a bed on which he was lying. One of them appeared to be a doctor, for he was counting the beatings of his pulse, though he, as well as all the others, had the look of rough and weather-beaten men.

"Where have you taken me to?" he asked, fancying for a moment that he had been picked up in his little pleasure-boat, and carried to shore in England.

"You are in my house, sir," said one of the group; "in the island of Alderney, among friends. Our life boat rescued you, and brought you here. We will do our best for you, be sure."

In Alderney! He turned his face towards the light, and through the uncurtained window he could see the rough and tossing sea, and that only stretching up to the distant horizon. He felt sick and giddy at the sight of it; and as if he read the story on the stormy scene, all the memories of the terrible time he had passed through flashed, with intense vividness, through his mind.

"Are there any others saved?" he inquired, in a faint undertone.

"One seaman, who gives his name as Fleck," answered the doctor. "Come, come; you must forget all that for a little while. Here, drink this."

He had scarcely swallowed the draught before he found himself falling asleep, with a strange and pleasant feeling of rest and forgetfulness stealing over him. When he awoke, some hours later, he felt stronger and better, though none the less miserable. He lay still for some time without stirring, brooding over the calamity, with all its agonizing details, through which the "Dolphin" had been lost. Presently he could bear his solitude no longer, and he sprang up in haste. He was feverishly impatient to see Fleck, for Fleck was the only one who had been saved. He crept down stairs tremulously, feeling all his nerves unstrung. The house was a large one, and evidently an hotel. As his footsteps made themselves heard, the watchful landlord appeared, and opened the door of a private room.

"I've ordered a fire in here for you, sir,"

he said; "it's more cheery, though it is not a chilly day. This is a very awkward place to be in in stormy weather. Our communication is cut off sometimes for days together, and there's not much chance of running over to Guernsey at present. Our steamer brought us in the mails yesterday, just before the storm. You'll be anxious to communicate with your friends, I fear, sir?"

"There is no hurry," answered Penrose, mournfully.

"Well, well!" said the landlord. "Fleck, the sailor that was saved with you, sir, says you'd be wanting to charter our "Queen of the Isles," cost what it would, and I have been sending out to see if I could find a crew. But not a man in the island will risk his life at present. You'll be forced to stay for awhile."

"I have no wish to leave," said Penrose.

"That's well," he continued; "we're going to bury the poor little cabin-boy to-morrow, and perhaps, if you feel well enough, you'd choose to follow him to the grave. But just as you please."

"Where is he?" asked Penrose, waking up to more interest in his landlord's conversation.

"He's lying up stairs," he replied; "the crew of the lifeboat picked him up in the water, but he was quite dead, poor little fellow. It was all over with him when they found him."

"Let me see him," said Penrose.

Victor's body was lying in a westerly room, and the light of the setting sun shone full upon his face as Penrose stood looking down upon it. He asked the landlord to leave him alone with it. The pale placid face, with the eyelids closed over the eyes that had been so

bright yesterday morning, wore a smile, partly of surprise, partly of joy. It looked very young and untroubled; there were no hard lines or wrinkles in it. The boy might have been sleeping, and dreaming happy dreams. It was almost as joyous as it had been when he was steering the boat that had gone to the rescue of Penrose.

He sat down beside the corpse, with his eyes fastened upon it, thinking. There seemed to come around the bed the images of those men who had formed the crew of the "Dolphin." Strange that he should know all their faces as well as though they had been familiar to him all his life! But they were his father's victims, and he could not forget them. How many more had been hurried away into the same great and silent mystery of death, sinking unseen and unheard into the gloomy and secret depths of

the sea? Their number he would never know. All he knew was that a fearful debt of crime against his fellow-men, and against God, lay to his father's charge, and descended to him by a fell inheritance. He had been daintily fostered and unstintingly indulged upon the proceeds of these men's agonies. He had not eaten a meal or clothed himself with a garment that had not been bought with blood. His whole past life, that merry boyhood and sunny pleasant youth, which had only ended yesterday, became a loathing to him. He longed to rid himself of it; to change lots with the poorest and meanest of men; to shake off his father's name and his father's claims upon him. In his utter wretchedness of soul he felt that he could never bear to look into his father's face again.

Why had he not died a few years ago

whilst he was like this pale, quiet, smiling boy beside him? If he had but gone away while he loved and trusted his father, and knew no wrong in him! There was no one else in the world whom he had loved so much —no one who loved him so much. Yet he shrank painfully from going back to him, or of entering into any communication with him. No! he would never return to England. It was a good thing that he had been cast upon the coast of Alderney, whence he could pass either to Guernsey or France, and fade away from his father's ken, leaving no clue behind him by which he could be traced. He would never taste another morsel of his father's bread, nor set his foot across his father's blood-stained threshold.

The sun went down while he was still brooding over his despair. All night long the same thoughts and memories haunted

him. When he was following Victor's rough coffin to the grave, he walked behind it as in a painful dream. He listened absently to the funeral service read over it, hearing little except the words, "In the midst of life we are in death: of whom may we seek for succor, but of Thee, O Lord, who for our sins art justly displeased." Yes! God was full of anger against sin, and what fearful sins had not his father committed against God! sins that must be visited upon himself, which were already being visited upon him!

He lingered behind, after everyone else was gone away. The stormy sky was dark with clouds drifting rapidly before the westerly wind. The low and ceaseless roll of the waves breaking all along the rocky coast sounded mournfully in his ears. Scuds of rain followed one another at short intervals, and if the sun gleamed out for an instant, it

shone through a mist upon the coffin which would hide for ever the face of Victor from those who loved him, and who were still watching for him to come home to them, unconscious of their loss. Penrose lifted up his hand, and, as if addressing a crowd of witnesses, he said aloud, though in a low and awe-stricken voice:

"I swear to God that I will never look upon my father's face again, nor touch a penny of his money, until he repents, and makes what restitution he can for these crimes!"

After that he left the open grave with the autumn raindrops falling into it. He felt a miserable sense of satisfaction in his own fixed resolve. It seemed to him that he was doomed to be the avenger of blood against his own father, and that he was entering upon his doom, to suffer and to inflict a

wretchedness that would in some measure meet the demands of justice. Human laws, at least in his own country, took no cognizance of such crimes, but Divine laws did. His father had filled many a home with misery; now his own home should be desolate. He had robbed mothers of their sons, and he would never hear again his son's voice call him "Father." Many a heart-sickened woman was looking still for the return of those who could never come back; it was only just that his father's heart should sicken, and long in vain to know the fate of his only son!

CHAPTER XI.

TOO LATE.

THAT night Penrose matured his plans for the sad future that stretched before him. He found that he had nearly 50*l* about him, besides a valuable watch and some jewelry. Half of his little fortune he must entrust to Fleck for the use of Victor's destitute family ; and Fleck, too, must carry the news of his miraculous escape to his father. That should be all ; he should not even know where he was going, so that no clue might be afforded for following him. As soon as the steamer began to ply again between Guernsey and Cherbourg, he would go to one place or

the other, and then cut off every trace of his future steps.

Several days passed before there could be any communication with the outer world. The sea boiled like a great cauldron all about the island, and the strong westerly winds blowing over it from the Atlantic were charged with heavy rains. Fleck loudly declared his determination not to trust himself aboard any vessel again, as long as there was a chance of foul weather. It was his secret intention never to trust himself at sea again in the best ship afloat, after he had once reached England in safety. How he should get his living he could not tell; he had been bound to the sea from his boyhood, and he was now too old to learn any other craft. But he would rather beg his bread in lanes and by ways, when he was out of sight of the police, than face the perils of the sea again.

At length came a partial calm. The little steamer made its way across to Guernsey, carrying a few passengers who had been weatherbound in Alderney, on their way from Cherbourg. But neither Penrose nor Fleck went in her. The young man, so lately the happy, prosperous son of a wealthy father, was suffering from a terrible fit of despondency, which had completely overmastered him. For Fleck the sea still wore too stormy a surface; besides, he did not care to stir until the owner's son was ready to go home. He was very anxious to keep in with young Mr. Penrose, who could put him into many a snug and safe berth on shore. So he made himself as attentive and necessary as he knew how to the broken-spirited gloomy young man, who did not seem in the least grateful that his own life had been spared.

The steamer brought back, amongst other

things, fresh newspapers from Guernsey. Penrose sat down to read them listlessly. There was a long catalogue of casualties at sea, as there always is when the weather breaks up suddenly and autumn gales set in. His eye ran over these, but found no mention of the "Dolphin." But as he turned the paper over, he caught sight of a paragraph headed, "Loss of a Ship and Crew, in the Channel." He read it mechanically, and almost tranquilly, till he came to the closing sentences: "The steamer 'Ellen,' of Portsmouth, has picked up the mate of the ship 'Dolphin,' outward bound to Algiers. He was found in an insensible condition, firmly lashed to the mizenmast. He states that the 'Dolphin' was caught in a sudden squall in the Middle Channel, on the night of the 18th instant, and driven violently on the rocks surrounding the Channel Islands. There was

no time to lower the boats, and the crew, numbering twelve men, besides captain and mate, must all have perished. There was also on board at the time the only son of James Penrose, Esq., a wealthy shipowner and wharfinger, well known in the London shipping trade. This gentleman, upon suddenly hearing the sad intelligence, was seized with an access of disease of the heart, to which he had long been subject, and is now lying in a hopeless condition at his residence in Onslow Square.

For a few minutes Penrose sat stunned and bewildered. This possibility had never entered his thoughts. He had not even known that his father was suffering from any disease, though he knew that he always lived a very moderate, careful life, sharing in none of the luxuries and splendors his wealth could purchase. He had harbored the idea of his

father mourning over himself, either as dead or as lost to home in voluntary exile; but it had never crossed his mind that a man, who could quite tranquilly send crew after crew afloat in rotten vessels, could not bear the shock of hearing that his only son had been cast away, and had perished at sea. A sudden revulsion of tenderness towards his dying father came over him. It could not be true what Captain Norcott and the crew of the "Dolphin" had asserted. Surely he knew his father better than any one of them.

He lost no time in chartering the little steamer to run over again with him to Guernsey, whence he could sail the next morning for Southampton. Fleck was thrown into perplexity by this sudden decision. The water was still too rough for him to venture on it without an almost intolerable dread, yet he must stick close to young Mr. Penrose.

He could not let him leave him behind in Alderney. But as he set foot upon the deck of the little boat, which tossed to and fro in the short chopping sea, he vowed that starvation itself should never drive him to a seafaring life again, let him once land in England in safety.

It was nearly midnight the next day when Penrose and Fleck reached London, after a tempestuous passage across the Channel. Even now Fleck would not part from his young master, as he called him; but, like a faithful though humble friend, he climbed up to the box beside the cabdriver who took them up at Waterloo Station. Penrose was too preöccupied to notice him. All day long, sitting silent and comfortless on the paddle-box of the steamer, he had been pondering over, in his troubled brain, what he should say to his father, and how he could find out the truth or falsehood of the statement made

by the captain of the "Dolphin." He had asked Fleck what he knew and thought about the ship, and Fleck had declared that he could say nothing against the "Dolphin," and he had never been told that her owner was Mr. Penrose. He had sailed many a time in Penrose's ships, and right good ships they were, with good skippers in them, and the best of grog. The best times he had known as a seaman had been in Penrose's ships; that was true, if they were the last words he ever spoke in this world.

Fleck's assertion had cheered his spirits, though it did not perfectly reassure him. As he drove towards Onslow Square, he resolved to say nothing about his sad suspicions, until his father had quite regained his usual health. No doubt entered his mind that he would not recover, as soon as he found his lost son again, safe and sound.

There was no light about the house when they reached it; and he sprang out of the cab to ring the bell himself, softly, lest it should disturb his father. He felt very tenderly towards his father, whom he had been wronging by his suspicions. It was a long time before the low though continuous ringing, brought any answer. Then there came a gleam through the fanlight, and the door, with the chain on, was opened by the old butler.

"Let me in, Simmons," he said.

"Who is it!" asked the old servant, cautiously.

"Who is it!" he repeated. "Don't you know me, Simmons? How's my father?"

"It can't be Master Arthur!" exclaimed Simmons.

"It is," he answered; "I was saved from the wreck. Be quick, and let me in."

The door was opened as quickly as the man's shaking hands could unfasten it; and he stepped across the threshold with eagerness. At home again!—the home he had resolved never more to see. What centuries seemed to have passed over him since he had left it last!

"Good heavens, Master Arthur!" cried the old servant. "We gave you up for lost; and the poor master's gone too. He's dead, sir!"

It was all over then, and he had reached home too late. The words of his vow, taken so rashly at Victor's grave, flashed reproachfully across his memory. He never now would look upon his father's living face, though he would give worlds to see it smile once more upon him.

"He died yesterday," said the servant, in a low voice.

A few days ago such a shock would have bewildered and unnerved Arthur Penrose;

but now it served to make him more master of himself and those about him. He bade Simmons discharge the cabman and take Fleck down into the kitchen; and then he turned into the dining-room, where he and his father had so often sat together, chatting pleasantly. He could not remember a single harsh or cold word that he had ever spoken to him, and yet he had made up his mind to forsake him! He sank down on his usual seat, opposite to the high-backed comfortable chair where his father always sat. How vividly he could see him sitting there now, with the smile upon his mouth, and the pleasant glow of contentment on his face!

After awhile Penrose dragged himself slowly and silently up stairs to his father's room. A low light was burning there, for the dead are seldom left in darkness before they are laid in the utter darkness of the

grave. He turned down the covering which hid his father's face. It looked suddenly aged and worn, beyond anything he could have thought of. The hollow cheeks and temples bore plainly the traces of great anguish. Victor had looked as if he had been sleeping, and dreaming happy dreams. This face was the face of the dead, cold and hard as marble, bearing only the mysterious and inviolable seal of death.

True or false what the crews of many ships charged the dead man with, he had gone at last to his account. There was neither punishment, nor repentance, nor self-vindication possible for him now. His accusers might say what they would, his tongue could frame no answer. If troops of shipwrecked men and weeping wives and orphans came about him, his ear must be deaf both to their curses and their cries.

CHAPTER XII.

FLECK TEMPTED.

FOR three or four days after her husband had left her, Bessie Blake, in spite of the anxiety caused her by the desertion of two of the crew, was almost as content and happy as she ever felt whilst he was away at sea. He and Victor would soon be at home again, for the voyage was not a long one, such as some he had undertaken ; and as long as the wind was fair, and the river smooth, her spirits were good. The old mother was always in a gayer mood than Bessie, being naturally lighter-hearted and more hopeful; and she sang ancient Norman ballads

to little Nan and the baby, as he lay placidly listening in his great old cradle. It was a happy little household, in spite of the old Frenchwoman's rheumatism, caught amid the English fogs.

But when the calm weather was gone, and the river ran by in a swollen, sullen tide, driven and pressed by the hurrying winds, which moaned and wailed around the bow-window, and along the passages and store-rooms of the sailmaker's old house, and thick clouds were driven across the sky in dark troops —then Bessie's heart sank, and the old mother's voice faltered, as she still sang her merry songs to please little Nan. Nan herself often stood with folded hands, and a grave little face, looking up to the black clouds which hid the blue, and at the stormy gusts of rain that beat against the window-panes. It was a good thing that the father and uncle

Victor were in the "hollow of God's hand" now, and that He was holding them there safely for her and her mother. The little child was not troubled by a moment's doubt.

The news of the utter wreck of the "Dolphin" quickly spread through Wapping, as soon as it was brought by the rescued mate. There were two other Wapping men in her, besides Fleck, and Peter and Victor Blake; thus somewhat more than ordinary excitement was aroused by the calamity. The people in Wapping dwell in a little world of their own, shut off from London by the great docks, and the sluices leading up to them; and the sense of neighborhood is deeper among them than in other parts of the great city. It was not yet known that Fleck was saved; and his wife and children were loud in their lamentations, proclaiming themselves everywhere as a desolate widow and orphans. On the other hand,

Bessie Blake kept her grief to herself, shrinking from every expression of sympathy; and she was left pretty nearly alone in her trouble.

The blow fell, as all such blows fall, as if it had been altogether unforeseen, unthought of. Though Bessie had never let Peter leave her for a voyage without the sorrowful prediction that he was going away for ever, and though she had dreamed hundreds of times that he was drowned, yet, now that the thing she had dreaded had come upon her, she could not believe it. The mate had been saved; and why should not Peter, her own good, loving, God-fearing man? Surely, surely God had taken care of him! Not a step sounded on the staircase that did not make her heart leap with a hope that was as full of pain as of pleasure; for beneath the hope there lay a secret lurking dread that she dared not face.

When Fleck came home at the end of the second week, her dying hope sprang into new life. A great stir was made about him in Wapping, where he was received as one come back from the dead. Everybody who had seen the "Dolphin" as she sailed out on her fatal voyage held his own opinion, and was eager to hear it confirmed by Fleck. But Fleck swore confidently that the ship was as good as a ship could be, and was neither overladen nor undermanned. All men's minds had been softened by old Penrose's sudden and unhappy death, and they were reluctant to speak damaging words against the dead. Fleck's steady asseverations concerning the loss of the "Dolphin" stopped the mouths of the few, who were still ready to cast blame on the owners; and it was admitted to have been one of the unavoidable accidents of the sea.

Late on the evening of his reappearance in Wapping, Fleck made his way to Bessie Blake's dwelling-place. She had been waiting for him in feverish impatience, anxious to have her hopes confirmed. Little Nan and the baby were fast asleep; but the old mother was sitting up to hear the news, with a flush of color on her withered cheeks, and a bright light in her sunken eyes. The Dutch clock struck twelve before Fleck came; then he slunk into a seat by the low fire, burning down to embers, and hung his head, as if he could not look either of them in the face. He fancied he saw Victor hesitating to climb the tottering mast, and he heard himself saying, "Up, up, lad!" The words would not leave off ringing through and through his brain.

"Only tell me Peter was not lost!" cried Bessie, with parched lips that could hardly speak.

"No, no, my poor lass!" answered Fleck, shaking his bowed head; "he went down with the rest of 'em, poor fellow! I did my best for Peter, for old shipmate's sake; but, bless you! we ran on a rock as sharp as any needle, and the 'Dolphin' broke through amidships. Most of 'em were aft, lowering the quarter-boat, and there wasn't a chance for e'er a one of 'em. Me and the young master were in the forecastle; that saved us and Victor."

"Victor!" said the old mother; "is my son Victor safe?"

"No," said Fleck, with a troubled voice, "we did all we could for him; if it was the last breath I said it in, we did all we could for him, young Mr. Penrose and me; and we gave him a good funeral in Alderney; for the boat picked him up, only he was dead. Young Mr. Penrose followed Victor to his

grave ; and he'll do everything he can for you all. He's sent you a pound by me, and he'll come and see you himself some day."

Bessie's white face was hidden in her apron. The house was very quiet, with an awful deathlike stillness. There was no noise from the street, where all labor had long ago ceased, and there came no sound from the silent river. Even the wind, which had been moaning restlessly and incessantly for the last few days, was hushed. Fleck's words rang in her ears, as if he had been shouting them at her through the din of a storm. She shuddered when he stretched out his hand, with the sovereign in it, and touched her.

" Money ! " she said with a wild, confused air ; " what's that for ? "

" Mr. Penrose sent it to you," he answered.

" Penrose ! " she repeated.

"Ay! young Penrose," he said. "Old Penrose is dead, you know, and he's come into everything. He's promised to take care of you, and madam here, and the children; and he's sent you this."

"Did old Penrose's son send that?" she asked, pointing to the gold coin that glittered on Fleck's open palm.

"Ay! to be sure," he answered.

"Tell him, then," cried Bessie, "I'd rather starve to death in the streets than touch it with only the tip of my finger! Tell him God's curse rests on him and his ill-gotten gold. It's bought with the lives of men; of men like my Peter! Tell him his money is no better than the thirty pieces of silver that Judas threw away before he went and hanged himself."

"Chut! chut!" said the old mother softly and tremblingly.

"Mother," said Bessie, in a sharp, shrill voice of agony, "send him away! Why is he here, instead of my husband? Oh! why did God save him, and leave my poor Peter to be drowned? Send him away; and pray God I may never, never see him again, or I shall go mad!"

"And you won't take the money!" exclaimed Fleck, scarcely believing that he had heard aright.

But the old Frenchwoman was already holding the door open, and beckoning to him to leave Bessie to herself, and go away. His finger closed cautiously over the sovereign, and he slunk down stairs and into the open street, glad enough to get away from the sight of the women's grief.

But the question came to him what he must do with the money? It was mere folly to return it to Mr. Penrose, who had already

more than he knew what to do with. Besides, he could not return it to him without delivering Bessie Blake's terrible message; and that would be downright cruelty and ingratitude. Young Penrose was almost broken-hearted; and the only comfort he seemed to take was in the thought of seeking out and relieving the families of the lost crew of the "Dolphin," especially that of Peter and Victor Blake. He appeared to feel an extraordinary interest in Victor, and he had been very earnest in impressing upon him that he must take that money at once.

There was nobody in the world to tell young Penrose where to find Bessie Blake but himself; unless, indeed, which was most unlikely, he made very diligent inquiries after her about Wapping. It would be very hard for him, hard and harsh and cruel, to hear such bitter words as Peter Blake's wife

had just uttered. Would it not be better if he never saw her at all ?

Slowly a dim idea was forming in Fleck's cunning brain. He turned away from the door of his own house to take another stroll through the deserted streets. Bessie had been a proud hussy, always holding herself aloof from her natural neighbors, like his wife. He would not harm her ; but if she would rather die than take charity from Penrose, what a pity it would be for such kindness to be spurned and refused! Could no way be hit upon to save him from the trouble her conduct would cause him ? It would do nobody any harm if he could only think of some plan to spare Penrose the pain, and reap a little benefit himself.

There was his own wife, about Bessie's age, and there were his two youngest children, and his wife's mother ; why should not they take

up the part Bessie Blake refused to fill? With a little care and contrivance there would be no risk of young Penrose discovering the scheme; and it would be a relief and consolation to him to believe that he was supporting Victor's people. For himself he was resolved never to go to sea again, and how his family were to be kept he could not tell. But if they played this game well there would be no need for him to trouble himself as long as they could keep it up. Penrose would see that none of them came to want. The idea had not occurred to him until after Bessie had refused to accept the money; though it had been burning in his pocket all day long, and he had been longing to appropriate it. Now as he rambled about the quiet streets, turning over his plot, and arranging all its details, his fingers played with the gold coin, till all was settled in his busy, crafty brain. It was a

a clever dodge, he said to himself, and with very little risk in it; and Bessie Blake had only herself to blame for it.

CHAPTER XIII.

HARD TIMES.

FOR the first few days Bessie seemed stunned and paralyzed by her trouble. After her few household duties were done she would sit in the bow-window, looking out with a wan, set face upon the vessels passing to and fro, up and down the river. Never more would she, and Peter's mother, watch for his ship sailing homewards; never more would she bid the children clap their hands and shout "Father!" as if he could hear them call amid the noises on deck. What was there left for her and them but to die, as her husband had died, to swell Penrose's riches?

But before the week was over a fresh calamity aroused her from her despair. The sailmaker handed over his stock and house of business to his creditors, and she had notice to quit as soon as she could find another dwelling-place. It was high time to wake out of the dull stupor of grief, for their stock of money was well nigh spent ; and she had a helpless, ailing old woman, and two little children, all looking to her for the bare necessaries of life.

It had been a sad time for Peter's mother. She had never fairly felt at home in England, nor had she grown quite accustomed to English manners. Now she had lost her sons, a dreary sense of utter loneliness and desolation preyed upon her. It was a cruel country, where no one cared for brave men like her husband and her sons, but left them to perish, if other men grew richer by their death. Now

this fresh blow had fallen she knew well enough that Bessie must have a desperate fight for bread for herself and the children. But if she went back to Normandy there would be no home for her except the hospital, and she shrank painfully from seeking a refuge there. Her father had been a prosperous fisherman, owning several boats, and had given her a good sum for her marriage portion, though he had not altogether liked her wedding an English sailor. She had lived so well after her marriage, among her own people, surrounded with every English comfort, and made so much of by her English husband, that it was tenfold more humiliating to go back to her native town and there beg for a corner and a bed in the hospital.

But there was a simple courage and tenderness in her heart which would not suffer this pride to turn her aside from treading her old

dignity and good fortune under her feet, if that was the right thing to do for Bessie and her grandchildren. She could not be any other than a burden to Bessie if she remained. Yet to part with her and the children and place the deep and cruel sea, the grave of her husband and son! between herself and them, how hard that would be? All through the sleepless night that followed the notice to quit the sailmaker's house this question rang through her brain, "Must I go? Must I leave them?" but before the late, lingering sun rose the answer was clear to her. She must go.

"Bessie," she said, early in the morning, "I will go back to my France, my Normandy. You shall never be able to keep me; that is impossible. I go to eat the bread of charity from my own people, not from strange people. I cannot go into what you call a workhouse.

I must leave you and my baby and my Nannette. It is too much of misfortune; yet the good God loves us still."

"If I could only believe it!" wailed Bessie.

"But in truth he loves us," persisted her mother-in-law, with tears in her dark eyes. "His Son, our Lord Jesus, had sorrows worse to bear. His poor mother had sorrows worse to bear. She did stand by him and did see him hang on his cross, the crown of thorns upon his head, and she must not try to take him down from the cross, and she must not take one little thorn out of his crown. That must have made me die—to see Peter and Victor sinking in the sea and not to do something to save them."

"But Mary saw him again in three days," said Bessie.

"And we shall see Peter and Victor again," she went on, "not in three days, but some

day. But I shall go back to my town ; I can live here no more. And I will take with me nothing but my cradle, our cradle, where I rocked Peter when he was my first eldest little baby. They will let me keep it in the hospital, if the sister Marie is still alive. The sister Marie knows me very well."

There was little time for thinking over the question. Bessie could not bear to let Peter's mother go ; but December had already set in, with bitter snowy weather and keen north-east winds, and the poor shivering ailing woman was racked with sharp rheumatic pains. She had always been fond of talking of her sunny Normandy, with its bright blue skies and its blossoming apple-orchard ; and Bessie, who knew little of foreign countries, except the strange accounts brought by Peter from his voyages, thought it must be nearly always summer in France. It was best then

for her to go back to Normandy. So she packed up the few possessions that her husband's mother would consent to take away with her in the heavy old wooden cradle, and had it carried to the wharf, not far off, from which a steamer was about to sail for Havre. It was all hurriedly done, for she had but one more night to stay in her old home; and it would be a good thing for Peter's mother to be gone before she was turned out. With the baby in her arms, and little Nan clinging to her grandmother's hand, they passed sorrowfully along the old familiar streets to the wharf where the steamer lay.

"Mother," cried Bessie, "we shall never see one another any more!"

The Frenchwoman's brown face was quivering and her lips trembling, though she strove hard to speak bravely to her son's wife, whose face she was never likely to see again.

"The good God is very good," she said, "and he loves us. He is very good, though my two sons are lost, and I go away quite old, and solitary, and poor. If he does not love me, who shall be good to me? I have not one other friend. No, no. I have called Him always my good God, and he must be my good God still. He will love you and me."

"Are you going in the ship to look for father and Uncle Victor?" asked little Nan. They had neither of them found it in their hearts to tell the child plainly that both her father and Victor were drowned, though she had heard them say that they were lost. "Are you going to find father?" she asked, again pulling her grandmother's cloak.

"They'll never be found again, never, no more!" said Bessie, falling on her knees, and taking the little girl into her arms; "none of us will ever find father again."

"But God can find him," said the child. "God holds him and Uncle Victor in his hand, and he couldn't lose them. Mother, has God lost them out of the hollow of his hand?"

"No, no, my Nannette," answered her grandmother; "the good God cannot lose them. 'No one can steal them out of the hand of my Father;' that is said by our Lord Jesus. 'No one can steal them out of my hand,' he said also. There is not one of us lost in his hand. But I must part. Adieu, my Nannette, my Bessie, my poor little baby!"

Bessie put the baby into little Nan's arms, and clung weeping to Peter's mother. To part with her was something like losing him afresh. There would be no one left to talk with her about him, and to share her grief. She was such a poor, desolate,

bereaved, sorrowful woman, too! How ailing and infirm she looked, as she stood leaning over the bulwark, gazing back towards them, while the steamer moved slowly off! She stayed there, on deck, waving her white handkerchief towards them, long after her own dim eyes had lost all sight of Bessie and the children on the wharf; yet as long as she thought they could see her handkerchief fluttering against the dark hull of the vessel, she would not go below, in spite of the keen wind blowing up the river.

The last thing she saw was the bow-window, now black and cheerless, with no firelight gleaming through its panes. She crept away then, as if with a fresh wound in her sorrowful heart, down into the darkest corner of the cabin. The sailors, the rigging, every sound and sight, brought to

her mind too strongly her boys, whom she could never keep away from the sea. With her brown withered face turned away from the dim light, and with long-hoarded tears streaming from her eyes, she gave way at last to a paroxysm of deep and bitter grief, such as the old seldom feel. Her brave, beautiful sons! her pleasant, loving daughter-in-law! her pretty babies, whose cradle only she had brought away with her—all were lost. If she had but kept her boys in France, even if they had gone to sea, it would not have been in some worn-out or overladen ship. She could have borne it better if they had perished by the unavoidable perils of the sea, or if God had taken them away by one of his irresistible decrees. But they had had no chance; they had been cast away that the ship's owner might be a richer man.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN NORMANDY.

IT was a December morning, though soft and bright, as Peter's mother crossed over the mouth of the Seine from Havre to Honfleur. The high cliffs behind the town were clothed with trees still in leaf, and glowing with the rich crimson and amber of autumn. High among them stood the Cross, beneath which she had so often sat to watch the sea, upon which her husband was sailing. Low down on the shore, so near the water that its tides beat against the thick stone walls, lay the grey hospital, with its little

belfry, under which swung the deep-toned old bell, whose tolling had often sounded in her ears, as she returned in her father's fishing-boat from the low-lying, tide-swept sands, stretching out into the open sea. The little fleet of fishing-boats was sailing homewards with the tide, and she could hear the merry singing of the girls and women in them, as the steamer passed by them. Was it possible that she had once been light-hearted and gay like them, before she had met with her English seaman!

The jetty was all alive with the townsfolk, crowding down to meet the steamer. Besides these were the old fishermen and the fishwomen from the market, waiting to see what the boats would bring in. She knew nearly every face there. There was Michel, whom her father had chosen for her husband,

and who had been wise enough to draw back when he found that her love had been given to Peter Blake. He was the first to see her, but in a few minutes she was surrounded by a crowd of old friends and neighbors. Most of the women had envied her in former times, and wished that they, too, could find English husbands, to carry them away to that paradise for wives which lay across the stormy Channel. But the old men still remembered the blame that had fallen on Henri Baudin for giving his pretty daughter to an English heretic.

They formed a group about her, on the jetty, with her old wooden cradle beside her, all that she had brought back from that rich England whither she had gone. Where was her husband?—He was dead. Where were her sons?—They, too, were dead. They had all been lost at sea.

"My husband went out in a worn-out ship," she said, her voice tremulous and low, "and he was drowned; and my sons, both of them, went out in a ship overladen, and they were drowned. There were not enough men in the ship, for two of them made themselves deserters at the last minute even; they were sent to jail, and they are in jail now. If my sons had gone to jail they would have been saved."

"But how!" asked Michel, who had been listening eagerly, "did their Capitaine Expert let the ships go to sea worn-out and overladen? Did he not see that they were not good vessels, sound and safe? What sort of certificate could he give to them that the cargo was well laden and the provisions good?"

"They have no Capitaine Expert in England," she answered.

"No Capitaine Expert!" echoed half-a-dozen voices.

"But do they not insure their vessels in England?" inquired Michel; "how can they do it without a Capitaine Expert to give them certificates? Who surveys the vessels for them? The coast of England is dangerous above everything. My father, he went out with our General Hoche, when we took our fleet right into Bantry Bay; and lo! the English never showed their faces, or dared to send out a single vessel; but the winds and storms and tempests drove our ships back again to Brest, and we did not set a foot on their soil. The storms round England are like tigers. How can they do without a Capitaine Expert to inspect their ships?"

"In England," she said, "they get rich by losing their ships. They can insure their

ships for so much money that it is good for the owners when they sink. It was not so in former times, when they could not insure their ships; then the owners took care they were good and strong."

"What then!" cried Michel's wife, a sunburnt, brisk-looking woman, whose long gold earrings glistened in the sunlight under her snow-white cap; "do the English women not love their husbands, that they permit them to go away to sea in rotten old ships, without enough food? Here, in France, we would see if our men abandoned us like that! We would go up to Paris, every one of us, and make them change their laws. Bah, madame! Your fine Englishwomen do not care a straw for their husbands!"

"My Peter's wife loved him with all her heart," she replied, sobbing.

"Why, then," replied Michel's wife—"why

does she not go to the grand Lord Mayor of London, and cry, and pray for help! Why do not all the sailors' wives go up together, in a great troop, to the Lord Mayor's palace! Oh! if it were so here, in France, would we sit still and hold our tongues think you?"

"Everybody is free in England," answered Peter Blake's mother; "they all do as they choose."

"A fine liberty!" said Michel, thoughtfully —"liberty to throw away men's lives! But it is not possible. Do you mean to tell us that in London itself a ship can be overladen and sent away down the river, where many other captains and crews can see that she is overladen, and sails out to sea, and is lost there; and nobody in England asks where the ship is gone, and what has happened to the poor men? It is not possible!"

"My two sons sailed out to sea, and were

lost," she answered; "that is all I know. Nobody will ask about them, nobody will care, except me and Bessie."

"But it is incredible!" said Michel; "England is so great a nation for ships. If they lose their sailors what can they do? It will become a nation quite small, of quite little importance. They are not wise these Englishmen."

"The Englishwomen are too cold, too tranquil," added his wife; "they have no blood in their veins; they do not love their husbands. If they loved them, would they let them be taken away to be drowned in worn-out old ships? No, no, no."

"I loved my husband well," she said, with quivering lips. How often they had stood together on this jetty, watching the boats come in, just as Michel and his wife were doing now! It seemed almost as if the last

few years had been only a painful dream, and that in a moment or two she might awake to see him at her side again, and her son Peter, a boy of twelve, coming back in the boats. Was it true that they would never feel the sunshine again, nor see the river glittering in the light, nor hear the hundred cheery sounds of life mingling together all about them?

"Good day, my friends," she said, looking up, and trying to smile. "I am very tired. I must go on."

"But where are you going, madame!" asked Michel; "we will carry your baggage for you. Ah! it is the old cradle, I see; thy mother's cradle, Nannette."

No one had called her Nannette since her husband's death, and the tears started to her eyes. How could she tell Michel and his wife that she had no refuge but the hospital. Yet they were waiting for her answer, and

she could not keep her bitter lot a secret. She had gone away happy and prosperous; she had come home again penniless and childless.

"I must go," she answered, with a faltering utterance. "I must go to the hospital."

There was a dead silence for a minute among all the group that surrounded her, and Michel was the first to break it.

"Madame," he said, respectfully, "we will do ourselves the honor of accompanying you. You will be very welcome there."

In another minute a little procession was formed of old neighbors and friends, who pressed about her, speaking to her in tones of sympathy. The streets along which they passed were narrow and roughly paved; but she knew every house in them, and the faces that looked through the windows at the sound of so many footsteps, and the hum of

so many voices passing by, were many of them familiar to her. Was it more or less bitter to be treading these well-known streets on her way to the last poor shelter where she could lay her head? She could not tell. There was no chilling indifference, such as would have been her lot if she had gone into some English workhouse; but in England there would have been no sad memories awakened into life at every step she took.

At the great heavy door of the hospital she bade farewell to her escort. The old cradle was carried into the inner court, and she had to tell her mournful story again to the pitying Sisters, who gathered about her. But she was worn out and exhausted; the strain upon her feeble strength had been too long and too great. A sudden dimness fell upon her, and she stretched out her hands to them as if groping for help. She forgot the words

she was saying to them, and they heard her mutter, in broken sentences, "He has not lost—not lost them—not lost me—out of the hollow of his hand."

CHAPTER XV.

TAKEN BY SURPRISE.

ARTHUR PENROSE had vowed to himself to find out the truth concerning his father's dealings as a shipowner; but he was quickly entangled in a coil from which there seemed no clear way out. He was not yet of age, and had no legal right to push his investigations as far as he wished; while the executors of his father's will, old friends of his, assured him of his father's perfect integrity, and cast blame upon him as a son for suffering any doubts of it to linger in his mind. Blackburn, the mate of the "Dolphin," was ready to take his oath that he

knew of nothing that would imperil the safety of the ship and her crew, and swore most emphatically that the cargo was not only fair but had been skilfully loaded, being neither too stiff nor too crank. Sailors, he said, always cursed the owner in any moment of danger or difficulty. Fleck asserted the same. If every timber of the "Dolphin" had been heart of oak, and every bolt in her of the best wrought metal, the crew would have sworn that she was rotten, and nothing else than a floating coffin. There never were such liars and scoundrels as seamen, said Fleck.

Arthur Penrose was only too willing to be assured of his father's honor, and his own right to the riches he had amassed; yet he could not shake off the deep impressions made on that terrible night, when the "Dolphin," with most of her crew, had been lost

before his eyes. Peter Blake's steady but mournful words, spoken with such manly earnestness to himself, in the very thick of the peril, could not be erased from his memory. Neither could Captain Norcott's passionate statement be forgotten ; nor Blackburn's own admission, that if they ran ashore all the crew would desert. What was he to do ? Whom was he to believe ?

In the meanwhile Fleck's scheme prospered beyond his own hopes. Bessie Blake's removal from the sailmaker's house made him more secure in it ; for if young Penrose should take it into his head to institute any inquiries on his own account, all he could learn was that Peter Blake's widow and children had left their former home. But Arthur Penrose trusted Fleck without suspicion. Fleck's wife, and her mother, and the two youngest children, clad in decent mourning,

had been once to his house in Onslow Square, and had acted their part very well. Arthur Penrose found them less interesting than he had expected, but he regarded them with pity, and promised to allow them a pound a week, to be paid in advance every four weeks at the office in Wapping. This was more than Fleck had looked for, and he felt himself quite relieved from the necessity of going again to sea. It was a life that suited him well enough hanging about the wharf, and doing an odd job now and then, if he could get good pay for it, especially when he had overrun his allowance. It was really astonishing what a little way the ill-gotten money seemed to go.

As for Bessie, he never heard a word of her. She was as much lost as if, like her husband, she had been swallowed up by the sea. There were times when Fleck felt a little un-

easy about her and the children, and he idly wished he could find some trace of her. He fancied that if he only knew where she was it would make him more comfortable to help her with a trifle occasionally, as the widow of an old shipmate. But Fleck was deceiving himself. The heartless selfishness and utter dishonesty of his conduct would have caused him to shun the sight of Bessie, and have hardened him against her misery, until he would have passed her by, if he had seen her starving in the streets. He did not feel quite a villain, whilst he could imagine that if he only knew where she was, she should share in the comforts he was robbing her of. It was a bitter, cruel winter, and the thought of her haunted him at his own fireside, which he seldom frequented, and followed him to the tap-room of the "Ship at Anchor," which was becoming the only home he cared about.

He was sitting there one evening in March, very much at home, smoking and drinking with boon-companions like himself. It had been a bitter day, too cold for him, he said, to dawdle about the river-side on the look-out for work. It was warm and snug in the smoky tap-room, and he was in what he considered a comfortable stage of drunkenness, not yet top-heavy, nor quite half-seas over, but a little maudlin and confused. He was telling over again the story of the loss of the "Dolphin" and of his own rescue, with young Mr. Penrose, the wealthy ship owner, who had been his best friend since that terrible night. The tears stood in his eyes whilst he spoke of Victor, Peter Blake's young brother. Most of them knew Peter, poor Peter! he said, a good shipmate and a good seaman!

"Fleck!" said a deep, agitated voice in his ear, a voice he had never thought to hear

again; "Fleck, do you know ought of my wife and children?"

Fleck was sober in an instant. He dropped the long pipe he held, and shrank away in sudden terror from the hand laid heavily on his shoulder. It was neither a dream nor a mistake. There stood his old shipmate whom he had believed to be at the bottom of the sea. True, for a few weeks he had not felt altogether safe, especially as the mate had been picked up; but it was four months or more since the wreck, and all fear had faded away from his mind. But here was Peter Blake himself; a living man, no ghost. Superstitious as he was, Fleck would rather have seen his ghost.

"Do you know ought of Bessie and the children, and my mother?" he was asking again, and giving him a shake this time to arouse him from his stupefaction.

"No—no," he stammered. "Peter Blake! Is it you, Peter Blake?"

"Ay! it's Peter Blake," he answered, "boatswain of the 'Dolphin.' The old house at home is all shut up and dark, and I'm seeking for Bessie. I came ashore only an hour ago. Does anybody here know where Bessie Blake is to be found?"

Peter looked round him with a face of the deepest anxiety. Most of the men present had crowded round, and were staring at him, curious to hear what chance had saved him from the fate of the rest of the crew. Fleck himself seemed excited and curious; and there was a strange, though unmistakable, appearance of dismay in his crestfallen and thunderstruck manner.

"Maybe they'll know something at Penrose's office," suggested one of the bystanders.

"They know nothing about her there,"

stammered Fleck again, in haste. He was not ready yet with any fresh scheme, but he must keep Peter away from Penrose's office till he had found some loophole of escape for himself.

"I have heard say," continued the man who had spoken before, "that Penrose was doing very handsome by the crew of the 'Dolphin's' folks, and he'd never overlook the boatswain's family."

"So he did," said Fleck; "he sent Bessie Blake some money by me, but she wouldn't touch it—no, nor look at it. She said it was like Judas's money, the price of innocent blood; and I was to tell Mr. Penrose so."

"Bessie had always a high spirit," said Peter, with a gleam of a smile flitting across his grave and anxious face.

"Ay! so she has—so she has!" agreed Fleck hastily; "but that settled it with Penrose; and the sailmaker failed, and Bessie

left Wapping. I've searched high and low after her, for old sake's sake, but never heard a word of her nor from her."

"It's a hard thing," said Peter, looking round at the men, "to come back among old neighbors, and find that not one of them has had the heart to look after your poor girl and the little ones. I'd have done it for any of you, mates," whether you'd been shipmates or no. It's hard upon a man that's been cast away at sea!"

"It's a long while since the wreck of the 'Dolphin,'" muttered one of the men.

"Near upon eighteen weeks," answered Peter; "only eighteen weeks! and nobody can tell me where they are gone to! I'd have done my utmost for your wife and children, Fleck."

"She wouldn't have it," he said. "She cursed me, and him, and his ill-gotten gold. It's no good you going to Penrose's. I'll

help you find 'em to-morrow; if they're in London, I'll ferret 'em out, trust me."

"Good-night mates," answered Peter, turning away abruptly. He could hardly control himself. Was this the welcome home he was to get, after all his peril and anxiety? He had never been one to judge his fellow-men harshly; but he felt bitterly the carelessness and selfishness of his old neighbors, which had allowed them so soon to lose sight of his poor Bessie, and the three helpless creatures dependent upon her.

"Stay!" cried one of them; "tell us how you were saved from the wreck."

"I've no time to spin long yarns," answered Peter sternly. "I'd my lifebelt on, and I floated till a Dutch brig picked me up. She was bound for the Cape, and to the Cape I've been, and came home again in the first boat that was sailing. That's about all my story."

He went out into the dark streets, as the keen biting air of the spring night was cutting bitterly. It had been a long and tedious voyage out to the Cape, and the Dutch brig had not spoken with any homeward-bound vessel; but as soon as they had got to harbor, he had written to Bessie, telling her of his safety, and promising to be at home as soon as possible—perhaps even before his letter could reach her. It had never crossed his mind that any unforeseen casualty could deprive Bessie of her dwelling under the sail-maker's roof. That she must have found it hard to get bread, he had known and grieved over; but to discover that she had actually been turned out into the streets was a shock almost more than he could bear. Where was she now? What shelter had she found from this pitiless cold? Who had cared for them all?

God had cared for them—he knew that

very well. The God who had saved him in the utmost extremity of peril had not forsaken them. But Peter Blake did not believe that his peril, or the bitter trials he was dreading for Bessie, were any part of God's will. They had been brought about by the negligence, the covetousness, and the vile selfishness of his fellow-men. It was so bitter to him to think of it, that his heart felt weighed down with an intolerable burden. Was this all that Christ had done in the world by his agony and passion? Had he been lifted up upon his shameful Cross that rich men and poor men should all go on in their own way, never raising their eyes to him, who saved others but would not save himself? Yes; God cared for his dear ones; but if man had not cared also, they had been drinking the same cup of sorrows of which the Saviour had drunk before them.

As he passed by the police-station, he turned in to make some inquiries there. There was not much to be learned except that his mother had been seen embarking on a steamer to Havre, and that his wife and children had left Wapping immediately afterwards with a good cart-load of furniture. If Bessie had disposed advantageously of such of the furniture as she could spare, she would have made enough money by it to keep herself and the children from absolute want. That was the first gleam of comfort that had shone upon Peter since he had seen his old home shut up and deserted. His poor mother had gone back to her native place, and she would be easily traced. No doubt, too, she would know where Bessie was. As soon as he had seen old Penrose, he would cross over to Normandy.

CHAPTER XVI.

BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

FLECK knew that he was no longer to lie at anchor in still water, but that he was about to be driven to and fro upon a sea of troubles. His brain had been in too bewildered a state to suggest to him that he must not lose sight of Peter, until he had formed some new scheme, or come to some determination. As soon as he recovered his wits this oversight struck him sharply, but he could not meet with Peter Blake, though he spent half the night in searching for him.

As soon as Penrose's office was open the

next morning, Peter presented himself to ask for the address of Mr. Penrose. That another man belonging to the crew of the "Dolphin" should turn up again was not altogether welcome to Blackburn, the reputed owner, who had also been manager for Penrose. Of all the doubtful transactions in which old Penrose had been engaged, that of the "Dolphin" had been the most knavish, and had been the only one positively fraudulent. The sight of the "Dolphin" boatswain caused the well-remembered salt swindle to weigh heavily on Blackburn's conscience that morning. He wished heartily that the past could come back again, and he could undo what had been done. Fleck was a man easily disposed of, if he attempted any nonsense; but he could not look into Peter Blake's face without a qualm of terror. On the whole, he thought it would be best to give him Arthur Penrose's address,

without appearing to make any difficulty about it.

It was still early enough in the day for Arthur Penrose to be at breakfast when Peter Blake reached his home. There was no delay in admitting him. The old servant, as soon as he heard his name, dragged him into the hall by main force, and across it to the door of the room where his young master was breakfasting, which he flung open, and, pushing his visitor before him, cried out exultingly, "Here he is himself, Mr. Arthur; here's Peter Blake. There's another of 'em saved; all the crew will come back, one by one; and you'll be all right again."

Peter Blake's surprise at this reception was increased tenfold by Arthur Penrose's excitement when he saw him. Old Penrose's son, whom he had thought lost in the shipwreck, was grasping his hand in both of his, and

shaking it heartily again and again, though he could not utter a word. Peter himself could not command his voice to speak.

"Thank God!" cried Arthur Penrose, at last "thank God! I'll take heart again now. Your wife has not seen you yet, Blake?"

"No," he answered, "she has left the old place, and I cannot find her."

"She's here," exclaimed Arthur Penrose, joyfully, "at this very instant—in this very house!"

"Here!" he repeated, "here!"

"Yes, here," he went on. "I've taken care of her; she has not known any want; and this very morning she, and your children, have come with some little petition. They are waiting to see me now."

"Here!" cried Peter again. He had

not known how heavy a load of care had been weighing him down until now it was removed. The tears stood in his eyes as he shook Arthur Penrose's hand in his turn, giving it such a grip as he had never felt before. "Thank God!" he said, in his inmost heart, though the words did not rise to his lips. "Hadn't somebody better break it to her?" he said, with a tender anxiety; "she's been mourning me, and the joy maybe would be too great for my poor girl. The children won't feel it, little creatures! but Bessie—"

"Old Simmons is breaking it to her," answered Arthur Penrose, "or I am very much mistaken. They are down stairs having breakfast; and Simmons will listen to Fleck's yarns all day long."

"Fleck!" exclaimed Peter.

"Yes," he replied, "he has been a true

friend to your wife, Blake. In fact, I have not seen much of her, but he has attended to all her necessities, and taken care of her for me. He came with her this morning, and is waiting down stairs."

"Fleck!" repeated Peter.

As if he had heard his name, and answered to the summons, the door slowly opened, and Fleck himself crept into the room, though he came in no farther than sufficed for closing the door behind him. His face was *gray* and downcast, but there was a hard expression of insolence and defiance about his mouth, and his small red eyes were fastened steadily on Arthur Penrose. Peter Blake stood speechless, staring at him in utter perplexity and amazement.

"Fleck!" cried Arthur Penrose, "here is Blake. Has Simmons broken the news to his poor wife down stairs?"

"Ay, ay! he's broke the news," muttered Fleck, sullenly. "But I'm come to say it's not Blake's wife and children. I don't know where Bessie Blake's to be found, and I told him so, only last night."

"Not my wife and children!" exclaimed Peter.

"Not Peter Blake's wife!" cried Arthur Penrose; "who are they, then?"

"They're my wife and children," he answered, in a muffled, though dogged voice. "Bessie Blake called your money Judas's money, and wouldn't even look at it. She cursed you and old Penrose. She said she'd rather starve to death in the streets than touch it with the tip of her finger. I did it out of kindness to you."

"Then you've been imposing your wife and children upon me all this time," said Arthur Penrose, with a darkening face.

He had never much liked Fleck himself, or the woman who had passed herself off as Bessie Blake. The imposture seemed heartlessly cruel and mean to him.

"Ay! if you like to call it by a hard name," said Fleck, insolently. "I'd made up my mind never to trust myself at sea again; not after I'd been trapped into one of Penrose's old boats. I lost all I had in the 'Dolphin;' so now we are quits, you and me."

"No," he answered, with indignant anger, "we are not quits in this way. I shall give you in charge for imposing upon me."

"Stop a minute," said Fleck, with a cunning smile; "you might be cutting your own cable. If you give me up, I'll give you up. There's fifteen hundred pound, as I know of, that you've got by imposition, as you call it. What's that to the money you've paid me, or Polly yonder?

We've had a little over twenty pound or so, and you've put fifteen hundred in your pocket. Which of us two has imposed the most, Mr. Arthur Penrose? Which of us is the biggest cheat?"

"I do not understand a word you say," he replied; "and you are only making your case worse by your insolence."

"Peter Blake knows what I mean," continued Fleck, "and our captain knew; and Blackburn, the mate, knows. There was a pretty little lot of fire-arms consigned to Algiers, in nice new wooden cases, insured in all to fifteen hundred pounds. What were they, eh? Nothing save cases of salt, not worth fifteen hundred pence. Maybe, the rest of the cargo was of the same value. Do you call that an imposition, eh? If you send me before the justice, I'll tell my tale, and Peter Blake will swear to it."

"It is false," said Arthur Penrose, hotly; "it cannot be true, Blake!"

"It is true, sir," answered Peter, "and if I'm called on, I must swear to it. The insurance money ought to be paid back, though it wasn't you that cheated for it. Those cases were filled with salt, and I'm come to speak to your father, himself, about them."

"Oh, my God!" cried Arthur Penrose. He had sunk down upon a chair near the table, and now he hid his face in his hands from the eyes of Fleck and Blake. It was, then, true; his father, whose memory he had hoped to clear from false and envious accusations, had been guilty of, at least, one flagrant fraud. And if one, why not of all which were brought against him by his enemies? Of late he had been happier in himself, and more satisfied by the kind things said to him of his dead father. He had begun to enjoy

the idea of succeeding to his position and wealth, believing that no dishonor attached to them. But if this were true—why! then he must keep his solemn vow not to touch his money until full restitution had been made for all the wrongs by which his riches had been accumulated. It was a heavy burden of crime that his father had bequeathed to him.

His face looked aged and careworn when he raised his head. Neither of the two men had spoke or stirred during these few brief minutes of his profound anguish. But now Peter Blake spoke to him in a voice of respect and sympathy.

"I didn't mean to tell you, sir," he said; "Nay, I never thought to see your face again. But I promised the captain I'd see right done, and I came here to speak first to your father, the real owner of the 'Dol-

phin.' Leave your father to settle all about it, sir."

"My father is dead," he answered, with parched lips.

"Dead!" repeated Peter Blake.

"It is my business now," he said, in a broken and faltering voice, "and you must tell me all about it. Fleck, go home for the present you and your wife and children. Mark me! I cannot promise to let you off; but I'll think of it. Get out of my sight now."

Fleck was only too glad to go. It had been a forlorn hope with him that he might wring a last sum of money out of Arthur Penrose before he learned the truth from Peter; and he had brought his wife the first thing in the morning, with some well-arranged story of an immediate need of her next month's allowance. But he was glad

to get away free ; and leaving a message with Simmons that the woman was to follow him, he hurried out of the house, lest Arthur Penrose should change his mind and detain him.

"Stay with me," said Arthur Penrose, as Peter was about to follow Fleck. "Stay. I have not a friend in the world who will tell me the plain truth. You can help me in this trouble. Do not go away."

"Ay, I'd stay willingly," he answered, "but there's my poor girl and the little ones! When you said they were here I was lifted up so that now I'm ten times more cast down about them. I'll come back to you as soon as I have found them."

"It was a comfort to me, all the time, to think I was taking care of them for you," said Arthur Penrose, "but now that is gone. I'll come with you, and do my best to help you in the search."

CHAPTER XVII.

ANOTHER VICTIM.

BUT after three days' fruitless search in the vast labyrinth of London, Peter Blake resolved to cross the Channel, and seek out his mother in Honfleur. Arthur Penrose, who was restless and miserable, determined to go with him. There seemed to be more in common between him and Blake than between him and any of his former friends. The peril they had both encountered, and both escaped, united them by a close and firm tie, which was strengthened by Peter's manly and trustworthy bearing. They could share each other's anxiety and sorrow; and Arthur Pen-

rose would not leave him to pursue his painful search alone.

They remained on the deck of the Southampton steamer after all the other passengers had deserted it for the cabin below. To Peter it seemed unnatural to seek shelter in the cabin, and Arthur Penrose cared little for the stinging cold of the easterly wind. He was too wretched to feel it, except as a slight additional element to his state of misery. He was scarcely more than a lad yet; it was hardly three years since he had left school, and entered upon a world of which he knew no more than a school boy. But now, as he leaned over the bulwarks, gazing vacantly at the dim, dark sea stretching away to the distant sky, the sea which so lately had all but engulphed him in its unfathomable and unsearchable depths, he felt as though centuries had passed over him since he was a careless, light-hearted boy.

"Blake," he said, in a low, bitter tone, "what would you do if you found out that your father had been an infamous scoundrel?"

Peter could not answer readily. His father had been a brave, honest seaman, true-hearted and tender, with hardly a fault that he could remember. He had been drowned at sea; and on such a night as this Peter Blake had often looked across the tossing surface of his father's great grave with a feeling of pride in his father's worth.

"I came of age yesterday," continued Arthur Penrose, "and they told me what he had left for me—a fleet of rotten ships, heavily insured, and estates bought by what your wife called Judas's money. I have thirteen crazy old vessels out, any one of which may be going to the bottom, with all hands aboard her, at this moment. Blake, I've bid England farewell. I'll never go back to her. I'll

change my name, and get my living how I can. But all that will not give me back my love for my father."

"No, no, sir," answered Peter; "that's being rash and cowardly. You cannot run away from trouble. Just say to yourself, "Suppose my father had repented in time, what would it have been his duty to do?" Not to run away, Mr. Arthur, nor to change his name, maybe; but to set to work and do what can be done to put things right. That is what God has set you to do."

"I cannot face the world with the name of Penrose," he cried.

"Let that be for a while," answered Peter; "let's see what you can do. Perhaps, if your father had repented, he'd have been so borne down by remorse and shame that he could have done nothing but hide himself from the world. But God Almighty took him away,

and left you to stand in his place. Everybody knows you'd nought to do with it; so you can make a fresh start altogether. What would I do? I'd make myself one of the best ship-owners in all England. I'd have the finest fleet of good merchant vessels sailing on the sea. I'd move heaven and earth to get wise laws made for owners and sailors. Do? I'd prove that I loved my country by helping to keep her mistress of the seas. I'd never run away and hide myself. I'd remember," and his voice fell into a quiet tone, "I'd remember that if I'd no father on earth, there is a Father in heaven, whom I could love and serve every hour of my life."

Arthur Penrose made no reply, except by giving Peter's hand a strong grip. His own hand was as cold as ice, and he was shivering with excitement and the chilling air of the night.

"Go below now, sir," urged Peter; "I'll turn into the engine-room; and if you can't sleep, just think over what I've been saying to you."

It was a fresh, pleasant spring morning the next day, when they were crossing the mouth of the Seine to Peter Blake's native place. The trees covering the slopes of the steep coast were all in their glory of spring tints. Higher up, he knew, on the great open country beyond in the orchards, and in sheltered dingles, where the sun shone warmest, the apple-trees were all in blossom—snowy blossom, if snow was but tinged through with a flush of crimson and gold. On the highest point of the cliff stood the crucifix, which he remembered so well from his earliest childhood. Below lay the town, climbing up the slope, street above street, with the sunshine glittering on the windows. Lowest of all, on the very edge

of the tide, stood the grey, old hospital; and the deep tolling of the hospital bell fell upon their ears as it had done upon his mother's amid the singing of the birds and the chatter of the passengers on board the little steamer plying between Havre and Honfleur.

It was the busiest moment of the day on the jetty when the steamer came in, for when the tide was out no boat could enter the harbor. The little knot of aged fishermen were lounging about, as usual, and instantly surrounded Peter Blake, talking to him in a language of which Arthur Penrose knew little. Old Michel was foremost among them, his weather-beaten face quivering with excitement.

"Welcome, my son," he cried, hugging him in his arms, and kissing him on the cheek; "welcome! Thy mother thought thee drowned, and Victor also. Come come!

she lives yet. Every day I knock at the door, and ask how Madame Blake is; and it is always the same thing, till to-day. But to-day she is worse."

"Where is she?" he asked, shaking himself free from the hands of the old man, who would have kept him to tell them his story.

"In the hospital," answered Michel, speaking quietly.

"It was a bitter pang to hear it. In the hospital, among the lowest and most degraded! Living upon public charity! He had not thought of that. And now the dread flashed across him that Bessie and his little children might be, at this moment, in some English workhouse. He hurried away, with rapid strides, along the pier, to the street which led to the hospital, hardly conscious that Arthur Penrose was following him closely, until he spoke to him.

"Have they told you anything about your mother?" he asked.

"Ay, have they," he answered; "they tell me she's been living in the hospital, where all the beggars and lunatics are. And she such a delicate, tender creature," he said, drawing his hand across his eyes; "my father would scarcely let her put her foot to the floor, and we boys waited on her like a lady. It's been very hard upon her—in her own town, too, where she was thought so much of."

"May I come with you?" said Arthur Penrose.

"Ay, sir; come," he answered briefly. His heart was too full for speech, as he paced rapidly along the roughly-paved street to the deep-arched portal of the hospital. An old porter, in a white cotton night-cap, and with bleared, dim eyes, opened the door to his ring.

"Yes; Mother Blake is alive still," he an-

swered, to Peter's inquiry; "they say she cannot die, poor soul! for she is a heretic, with dwelling so long in England, where there is no religion, and no fear of God."

"I must see her—this instant even," said Peter; "I am her eldest son."

"No, no; that is impossible!" replied the old porter; "she has lost her two sons, and her husband himself, in old English ships, that were left to go out to sea with no capitaine expert to see if they were good and safe. I said, 'Well, there is no religion in England.'"

"But I am her eldest son; I was not lost at sea," said Peter, urgently. The old man tottered away, across an open court, over which the cloudless blue sky was shining brightly, and called one of the nurses, who was busy in the hospital kitchen. She came to speak to the visitors in her long black robe and white cap, with flapping wings, under-

neath which was a peaceful, gentle old face, which Peter knew well.

"Sister Marie," he said, eagerly, "I am Peter Blake ; let me see my poor mother at once."

With hushed and labored tread the two young men followed the sister down the sick ward of the hospital, between rows of beds, where worn and suffering faces lay upon the pillows. It was a dark and gloomy room, for the windows were set high and far apart in the thick stone walls. The low moaning of the sea breaking on the shore filled the air. At the farthest end of the ward, on a low, narrow bed in the darkest corner, lay Peter's mother, with her face turned towards the old cradle, which stood between her bed and the wall. Her dark eyes were half open, and fastened upon it. But she did not stir at the sound of footsteps drawing near, nor as their shadows fell across her.

"She has never spoken since the day she came," said the sister; "she lies silent and tranquil as you see her. Speak to her, my son; she may perhaps hear your voice."

"Mother," said Peter, quietly; "mother, I am your eldest son. Look at me and see."

He laid his hand tenderly on hers, and knelt down beside her to bring his face on a level with her eyes, so feeble and dim. For a minute or two she lay still, but her lips quivered and her eyelids closed.

"Look at me," cried her son, laying his mouth close to her dull ear; "oh! my mother, open your eyes and look at me."

Still she did not speak, or stir; and the thin, cold hand lying in his remained lifeless. "Oh, mother!" he called, so loudly that the quiet room rang with the cry; "look at me but once! Speak only one word to me!"

Slowly her dim, dark eyes opened, and a

smile broke upon her wasted face. She gazed at him wonderingly, and then turned to look at the old cradle. She could see nothing but it and him. "It is my son!" she whispered, "not lost at sea. How good God is! He holds us all in his hand."

The eyelids fell again over her eyes, and her voice died away in tones so low and faint that no ear save his own could catch the words. But still her cold hand stirred a little when he pressed it, as if she knew that he was there. The lines of care and trouble seemed to be smoothed away from her face, and she smiled faintly now and then, as she caught the sound of her son's voice. But after a while the three who were watching her knew that the last moment was come. Her lips trembled again for an instant as if she was trying to speak, but no word came. She was dead.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A CROWN OF THORNS.

IT had been harder for Arthur Penrose to stand by, and watch Peter Blake's mother dying, than even for Peter himself. The thought that all this sorrow, with other unknown scenes of misery, were the direct consequence of his father's love of gain, was more than he could bear. At the moment that the poor, helpless woman died, he turned away hastily, and hurried from the hospital, not knowing whither he went. Unconsciously to himself his steps led him up to the brow of the cliff, which he had seen from the river, where the Cross stood. There was an open

unenclosed plot of ground, planted with trees, underneath which were many seats. He threw himself upon one, and sat still, crushed and benumbed in spirit. He was very young, and the young have a vast, unlimited capacity for a sense of agony and shame, before their sensibility is blunted by the daily fretting cares of life.

The spring sunshine glinted down upon him through the half-open leaf-buds on the swaying branches overhead. Little rainbow-colored clouds of mist floated here and there upon the broad river, which joined the sea at its feet; and on the sea itself snowy streaks of foam played and disappeared, sparkling with light. Birds were singing and flitting to and fro from every bush and tree, and in the topmost boughs the rooks were chattering among their nests. There was a scent of violets and primroses in the fresh, sweet air,

and he could hear children calling one to the other as they sought for the blossoms among the green tufts of grass in the hedge-rows. At the foot of the cross a group of them were playing and making garlands and crowns of the spring flowers, and one of them had climbed up to place a little crown of primroses as high as she could reach upon the cross. He saw and heard all keenly; so keenly that the memory of it could never pass away from his brain.

But his agony remained unabated. He felt himself cut off from all this outer joy and gladness. It was he whose wealth had been bought by the deaths of men; by widowhood and orphanhood. It was his ships that were sailing now, with rust-eaten iron and rotten timbers, and decaying rigging, sailing over yonder treacherous sea, which was smiling up to the sky

above it, but hiding a black gulf of death beneath its glittering waters. Could he do anything better than abide by his first resolve? To exile himself forever from his native land; to forget, if possible, his father's name, and to leave his sad heritage of shame in any hands that would take it up.

How long he sat there he did not know. People came and went; glanced at him, and passed by; but he paid no heed to them. The sun sank lower and lower in the sky, and the shadows about him moved silently eastward, and stretched farther across the sward. The tide, which had been at low water when he gained the height of the cliff, was coming back now, and the fishermen's boats were returning with it to the town. But he did not move. It seemed to him as if there would be greater pain in the effort than if his limbs

had been crushed instead of his spirit. Presently two of his own countrymen came up the steep road, and, giving him but a momentary glance, sat down beside him. The intrusion vexed him, but before he could resolve to change his seat their conversation attracted his attention.

"Old Michel tells me," said one, "that Blake, that fine young fellow who was said to be lost at sea, has turned up agair They are talking of it everywhere."

"Yes," answered the other, "they say he had a narrow chance, and only two more of the crew were saved. It is the old story; an unseaworthy craft, and overladen into the bargain. Ships that ought to be broken up are sold for what they will fetch; and the owners know they are bought to be sent to sea in an unworthy condition. Bless you! they wouldn't think

of sending them to sea themselves, not they! They are upright, honorable men. But they will take three or four thousand pounds for them, knowing very well what they are bought for. I'm an honorable, upright man, and I sell you a jibbing horse, more likely than not to break your neck if you get astride him. Why not? Am I to lose the price of my horse to save your neck? It is your fault for getting astride him."

"Exactly," said the first speaker, laughing; "the sailors ought not to go aboard the vessels. They say the English sailors, as a class, are rapidly deteriorating; a set of scoundrels, who are better at the bottom of the sea than corrupting the land by their lives."

"What can you expect but scoundrels?" asked the other, "when their lives are

reckoned of so little value? I am amazed that a fine fellow like Blake should follow the sea; only it is in his blood. But mark my words! if matters go on as they are, the dangers and disasters at sea will take such hold of the minds of boys, aye, and of boys' mothers, that they won't be sailors at any price; and shipowners will have only the scum and dregs of the streets to man their ships. They talk of the carrying trade of England. How will they like it, when there are none but foreign sailors to be met with? I say, when a nation begins to look at her material wealth as greater in importance than the moral and physical welfare of her people, she has taken the first step downwards. And England is doing it."

"Yes," said his companion, rising from his seat to pursue his walk, "and I say

good men must submit to laws that bad men may be curbed and restrained by them."

The night was falling, but Arthur Penrose did not quit his place. The electric light in the light-house off Havre glittered like a diamond against the pale clear green of the evening sky. The opposite banks of the river were fading softly in the gathering gloom, and the sea was growing dark. Close beside him the Cross stood out sharply against the grey of the twilight; and he could still see the fading crown of primroses hanging upon it. Some long-forgotten words, which he had heard he knew not where, flashed across his memory, and his brain caught them, and repeated them over and over again: "Who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the

shame, and is set down at the right hand of God?"

What did the words mean? At first his wearied and torpid mind could only repeat them mechanically. He had heard every word his countrymen had said; but they did not seem to have any connection with him and his misery. But there was something that touched him in these words, if he could only catch their meaning. "Depising the shame." An intolerable burden of shame was his; could he ever despise it? Could he ever endure the cross?

That was what Christ had done. He had suffered, not for his own sins, but for the sins of others. He had submitted, not to death merely, but to shame and ignominy such as was shared with him only by the veriest wretches and villains upon the earth. He had seen the people laughing him to scorn

as they passed by his cross, and heard them mocking him with cruel raillery, in his hour of bitter anguish. He had endured it all; yes, and despised the shame of it. With no fault found in him, without spot or blemish of his own, he had given himself up to the death of a criminal, and had closed his eyes upon earth amidst the jeers of his enemies.

His own burden was light when compared with that. Shame there was, but it could be outlived. The cross was heavy, but it could be borne. He must not shrink from enduring either cross or shame.

At last he lifted up his eyes to the dark blue sky of the night above him, with a new-born sense of courage and hope. A fresh field of work opened before him. He had thought of fleeing from the past and present; but now he would turn and front them. His rotten vessels were on the sea still; he must

hasten home, telegraph to every port, where it was possible any of them might touch, and send instructions how to act to each captain, so as to ensure the safety of his seamen. His father's ill-gotten riches had descended to him; they should be used to atone for the miseries by which they had been amassed. Those who were dead were beyond his reach; but for their sakes, and in memory of them, the living should have his whole life devoted to their interests. England had been disgraced by his father, and men like him; but he would leave no means untried to wipe out the blot.

He looked once again at the darkening Cross; and gently took away the child's little crown of flowers. If ever his crown of thorns should pierce him too sharply, this withered wreath should remind him of the hours he had just passed through. He could never be

a light-hearted, sanguine boy again; but he could face life as a man, with nerve enough to encounter opposition, and contempt, and shame, and with a secret confidence in God and right, which would bear him through to the end.

He did not try to meet with Peter Blake in the town; for he thought he would probably wish to be left to himself. But he wrote a letter to him, telling him of his new resolves; and by the steamer which started early in the morning he returned to England, to set out at once upon the path he had planned for himself.

CHAPTER XIX.

FOUND AT LAST.

PETER BLAKE left Normandy with a heart fuller of anxiety than when he started from England. He had reckoned confidently upon obtaining some clue to his wife and children from his mother; but she had passed away without once naming them. The Sister who had charge of the hospital told him that she had never spoken of them. From the first moment of her paralytic seizure, when she was admitted into this last, mournful asylum, she had been speechless until the hour of her death, which he had been in time to witness. The only sign of

consciousness she had given was the pain and restlessness she manifested if the old cradle was ever out of her sight; though what was passing in her clouded mind none of them could guess. "She was a true mother!" said Sister Marie, with a sigh. Peter begged of her to take good care of the old cradle, in which his own little children had been rocked, until he could send for it, if ever he had a home of his own again.

But at present his home was lost in a terrible darkness. Somewhere, in some poor shelter, Bessie must be dwelling, with Nannette and the baby; though Victor and his mother were dead. But how to find them? He was one of those men whose beloved ones are never really out of their thoughts, though they may be diligent and skilful about their work. Even at the busiest moment some fond recollection of his children would

flash across him, and bring a smile to his face. Bessie's singing would seem to ring in his ears when the deck was all quietness and he was keeping the watch through the dark hours of the night. Then he would conjure up in fancy the peaceful, safe, and happy home he possessed, where his treasures were, lying securely guarded for him in the heart of England. But now, after being snatched from the fearful death which had swallowed up his shipmates, he had come back to find his home broken up, as if it too had been some frail and rotten bark that could not fail to be wrecked on the stormy sea of London.

His heart was very sore and sad. There was a wrong somewhere ; yet on whose head should the blame fall ? That God did not ordain this misery he felt quite sure. No ; the fault lay in man's own selfishness, not in

God's rule. It was the old plea urged by Cain. "Am I my brother's keeper?" repeated silently or loudly by almost every human being. It was the same black warp running all through the web of social life, from the unscrupulous shipowner, Penrose, who flung away lives without a qualm, down to Fleck, whose selfish cunning had left Bessie to sink under her troubles. "All ye are brethren," Christ had said. A strange brotherhood truly had been wrought out in this Christian country; though nearly nineteen hundred years had passed since the Master had spoken those words.

It was evening when he reached the Waterloo station; and he took a train at once to London Bridge. Almost instinctively he turned his face toward Wapping; for there was no other spot in London where he had ever had a home. It was a chilly spring

night, with a white mist driving in from the Essex marshes on the night wind. He was glad to put on his thick coat of pilot-cloth, and pace along briskly past the Tower, and the wharves, and cross the bridge leading to the quiet streets of Wapping. He was going to find Fleck, who was the person that had last seen Bessie and the children. Peter had found it hard work to conquer his resentment at Fleck's cruel imposture, which had turned aside Arthur Penrose from the search he would have instituted at once for Victor's friends. But for Fleck his mother might still have been alive; and his wife and children would not have been lost. Yet he must seek him out once more, and learn from him all that could be learned about them.

Fleck's house he knew very well. It lay at the end of a somewhat squalid and blind court, at the back of the high wall which sur-

rounds the London Docks. He had seldom been there before; for there had been no more companionship between the two seamen than that which arose from both following the same calling, and from having taken one or two voyages on board the same vessel. Fleck had no thought above the gratification of his low desires; while Peter always acted under a strong sense of honor, and of duty, both to his country and to God. To serve God, and be true to England wherever he went or however he might be placed, was his ambition. It was no wonder that he found little in common with his low-minded, cunning and selfish shipmate.

There was a light in the lower room of the house where Fleck rented the upper floor. When Peter knocked the door was opened, though only by a handbreadth, and a woman peered out cautiously into the mist, holding

the door with both hand and foot, lest an entrance should be forced against her will. She was too old a woman to be Fleck's wife.

"Is Fleck at home?" he asked.

"This ain't Fleck's house," she answered, sharply. "I only let him my two first floors; but he paid his rent up and flitted, bag and baggage, nigh upon a week ago. I've been bothered enough with him, and folks coming after him."

"Gone!" exclaimed Peter.

"Ay, gone, my good young man," she continued, a little more gently, "I did hear him say, I don't deny it, that there was one law for the rich and another law for the poor, and he'd better make hisself scarce. Something about cheating or being cheated. Any how he's took hisself off, and his wife and children; and I say a good riddance of bad rubbish."

"And do you know nothing more about him?" he asked.

"Not a ha'porth more than you do," she answered; "I left off asking him questions that I might have no more of his lies. I hope no more folks will come bothering after him. It's not half an hour ago a woman came, with two children, asking for Fleck."

"What sort of looking woman?" inquired Peter, eagerly.

"Oh! a young woman, with a big baby in her arms," she replied, "and a little girl of five, or thereabouts. She seemed very low and cast down, poor thing! and I almost wish I'd asked her to step in and rest a bit; but there! decent folks can't be too careful of theirselves in London."

"Only half an hour ago!" said Peter.

"Not longer," she added; "I almost thought it might be her again; and I'd have

asked her in and given the child a slice of bread. She said she was hungry, poor little lass! Only one is so often taken in by beggars like that."

But Peter Blake scarcely heard the last words. Only half an hour ago, and Bessie and his children, for he could not believe it was any one else, had been in this very court, and standing at this very door! Yet now, where were they? It seemed impossible that they could have trodden this very causeway, and left no footmarks whereby he could trace them. If they had been shipwrecked on some wild coast, he might have tracked them along the sandy shore, or made them hear his voice calling to them among the rocky cliffs. But here, in the streets, they might be no more than a few paces from him, yet he might pass on, and never see them!

He paused for a minute or two at the out-

let of the court, considering. Before him rose the dockyard wall. To the right, where the short street ended, there was a number of turnings, any one of which Bessie might have taken. Round the corner to the left lay the old churchyard, and not far beyond that the bridge over which he had just crossed from the city. Which way had Bessie taken? Where were her weary feet wandering now? And Nanny's little feet, which should have no rough paths to tread if he could help it. Cast down, and hungry, and homeless, were they? Yet, thank God! they were neither dead, nor in a workhouse. One-half of the burden that had weighed upon him was taken away.

He did not waste much time in choosing his path. He turned quickly in the direction of the bridge to ask the watchman there if any woman with two children had passed that

way. The grey headstones in the old churchyard glimmered before him, for the moon was shining behind the thin, white mist; and dim shapes were visible in the pale light, though in the shadows all was dark and hidden. At that hour there was no one in the quiet spot except himself, and his rapid footstep sounded noisily in the stillness. But he paid no heed to the white moonlight on the graves, or the solemn silence, until he heard the pattering of little feet running after him, and felt a child's hand catch at his pilot-coat.

"Mother says I may ask you to give me a penny; I am so hungry," said a child's plaintive voice.

He stopped instantly, stunned and bewildered. Surely it could not be his own little child begging from a stranger in the streets! Was it possible that Bessie was really hiding somewhere in the shadows, waiting for a pen-

ny from a chance passer-by? His bright, merry, good little wife, with her high spirit, brought so low! There was intense bitterness to him in the thought. He had always been so proud of her, so careful for her. Was he in this way shown what her fate must have been if he had actually been lost in the "Dolphin?" Yet he had found them; they were close beside him. Little Nan's hand was pulling at his coat, as it had done many a time before when he reached home. They should suffer no longer, for he was as strong as ever to win all they needed by his labor, and to shelter and protect them from trouble by his love.

"Father is lost at sea," said little Nan, beginning to cry, "and Uncle Victor too. We've got no house now, and we're cold and hungry."

Still he could not speak a word; but he

stooped down and lifted his little girl in his strong arms. Then he leaned against the railings of the churchyard, half afraid that he might stagger and fall. He had never felt so shaken and unstrung before. What must have become of them if he had been lost at sea? Little Nan, frightened, yet quiet, pushed back his cap with her cold hands, and looked closely into his face.

"Why! it's father!" she cried, "come home again! Oh! let me run and tell mother."

"Where is she?" he asked, almost in a whisper.

"Come, come," she said, struggling to get down upon her feet, and pulling him eagerly by the hand as soon as she was on the ground. He had but to walk a few steps into the concealing mist, and there sat his wife, crouching in a doorway, with her baby on her lap, and

her gown drawn over it to keep it warm. He could only command his voice to call her name, "Bessie!"

How they met one another they could never tell exactly. Bessie never spoke of it in after days without breaking down with tears. There was too deep a blending of sorrow and gladness; for there were two gone, who could never return to the old familiar life, though there would be a home again. Bessie could hardly believe that her husband's presence was not a dream, until she found herself sitting by his side in a warm and lighted room of a quiet lodging-house close by.

"Oh! I've been very ill," she said sobbing, when he asked her how she had fallen to such a strait as this, "and I could not write to your poor mother, and I never heard a word of her. My illness ate up all I had, and I pawned our clothes; and still I could not

find any work to do. It's been a hard winter for poor folks. But when I came to the end of all, I bethought me of what Fleck said about young Mr. Penrose. I was going to ask him to do something for me and the children; though it was hard to come down to that. Only I found out I couldn't starve in the streets, with two little children starving too. And then Fleck was gone away, and I was wishing we were all dead and buried, and little Nan ran after a stranger to beg, and it was you!"

It is not many years since these things happened. Arthur Penrose and Peter Blake are both young men still, and firm friends. Both are doing their utmost to set things right wherever they find them wrong. What Peter Blake can do he does to raise the character of his fellow-seamen, and make them efficient, sober, and honest mariners. Never again has

he signed ships' articles without making sure that the vessel is seaworthy to which he trusts his own life, and the welfare of his family. No ship of Arthur Penrose has set sail for any voyage, long or short, without being as safe and sound as the best iron and timber can make her. He is never likely to be a rich shipowner; but he will be a true and honorable man, if not a happy one. His father's sin darkens life for him. Two of the vessels which were afloat when he died have never been heard of again; and when or how they were lost no man returned to tell.

Fleck has been seen only once by Peter, selling seamen's tracts in some back street, but he made off as soon as he caught sight of his old shipmate, and Peter had barely time enough to see that he looked wretched and degraded.

Little Nan still believes that the sea is in the hollow of God's hand.

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